

Submission to the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network  
People's Inquiry in US-Australia Alliance

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## Part I Context/interests/identity

### 1. The Australia-United States alliance and Australian foreign and defence policy.

Foreign policy is the wider framework, concerned with the management of risks external to Australia and the development of the resources and agency to pursue the interests of Australia and its people. The distinctive characteristic of defence policy in government is that it is uniquely concerned with the actual or potential use of organized lethal violence – specifically for the purpose of the military defence of Australia, its state, and its people and their interests.

The alliance encompasses both foreign policy in its broadest sense – epitomised in the sense of Australia belonging to the Anglosphere – and defence policy as the framework for the application one of the tools available to the state – organised lethal violence – in the service of realising foreign policy objectives.

Defence policy should be coordinated with other tools such as diplomacy, foreign aid, soft power, and cooperative security structures. Hugh White provided a useful framework for some fundamental concepts for thinking about how to answer to the question: ‘What do we want our armed forces to be able to do?’.<sup>1</sup>

If *national interest* can be seen as concerning ‘everything that affects Australia’s well-being’, including a broad category of *security interests* – often understood properly and broadly to be to do with dealing with different kinds of threats and hazards. The pandemic pushes us that we have to think much more seriously and constructively about *biosecurity* than homeland-centred self-defeating beggar thy neighbour policies. White suggests thinking about *strategic interests* as a narrower sub-set of security interests:

‘These are the interests which relate to the risk of conventional military threats against Australia, and which do so sufficiently directly that we might want to use

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<sup>1</sup> Note White’s curious omission here of risks to Australia’s strategic interest from nuclear weapons (including through the pathway of hosting certain foreign bases with nuclear war-fighting roles) – matters on which he has written himself. Hugh White, ‘Strategic Interests and Australian Defence Policy: Some Historical and Methodological Reflections’, *Security Challenges*, vol. 4, no. 2 (Winter 2008), pp. 63-79.

armed force to protect them. Strategic interests are therefore those elements of the international order that affect, directly or indirectly, the likelihood or seriousness of an attack against us. They reflect the ways that our vulnerability to attack might be increased or decreased by changes to the international system, the distribution of power and influence, and the balances of military capabilities.<sup>2</sup>

This is useful in so far as it makes clear that in thinking about the US alliance involves addressing more than strategic interests. But since the alliance is presented in terms of its ability to realise our strategic interests, then White's clarity is helpful for the moment. White then suggests that thinking our strategic interests then helps frame the objectives of policy: *strategic objectives*.

'Our strategic objectives will be to protect our strategic interests: our purpose will be to shape the world in ways that minimise the likelihood or seriousness of military threats.'

This helps separate out the idea of using armed forces from other, increasingly pressing, uses for the military – militarised border policing, protecting Antarctic fishing zones, providing emergency services, and so on. Some worthwhile or possibly appropriate, and others distinctly not. But the key point is that none of these what fundamentally distinguishes armed forces and what they train for and why they should be very closely regulated.

This helps focus attention on how the alliance affects use of the armed forces to advance Australia's strategic interests. White offers another useful caution – whatever strategic policy is adopted – alliance or armed neutrality or some other framework - there will always be limits - a gap between what analysis of strategic interests suggests is desirable and what is practically feasible:

'We have strategic interests which we cannot realistically expect to be able to protect with armed force, because we lack the power to do so. Hence there will always be strategic interests which we cannot translate into strategic objectives.'

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<sup>2</sup> Hugh White, 'Strategic Interests and Australian Defence Policy', p. 66.

This is particularly the case for small or middle powers like Australia – and Australia is somewhere between the two categories, despite our ‘Middle Power Dreaming’ or the depressing cliché of ‘punching above our weight’:

‘Indeed it is the perennial fate of small and medium powers that their security from attack depends on factors in the international system which they have no power to influence, either by military or by other means. For them, good policy aims to maximise their influence, but realism requires recognition of its limits.’

## 2. Retrieving the meaning of national interest to reflect the real interests of all Australians.

Australian foreign and defence policy must be based on an understanding of national interest, a phrase that is often used as if that matter was straightforward and uncontested. It is neither, and yet at this point we cannot do without it. We must fight for interpretations that reflect the real interests of all Australians.

Just what Australian ‘national interests’ are potentially a matter of contest between different groups in Australian society, with the degree of contest and the content of claimed specifications of national interest varying over time as the external context changes. We may be deeply concerned, both morally and analytically, with the wider human interest and the sources of insecurity impinging on Australia from economic and political dynamics in the world at large, but until a new political system of democratic accountability beyond the nation-state is invented (and that will most likely come after catastrophic war if history is any guide), we are stuck with the very limited forms of accountability of a capitalist electoral democracy.

In electoral republics (aka ‘democracies’) like Australia foreign policy and defence policy are the areas of government most insulated from pressures deriving from public opinion. Only rarely do Australian mass social movements, usually in conjunction with external political or military adverse developments break through these insulating layers.

For many years Australia has suffered a severe limitation on democratic accountability on matters of defence policy and the alliance because of a pattern of bipartisan agreement by the opposition with the government of the day, on virtually all except marginal matters.

The existing high degree of political party bipartisanship on the defence relationship to the United States combines with a restriction of citizen access to informed reporting and commentary in defence and foreign policy to seriously impair the operation of public scrutiny of government policy.<sup>3</sup> This in part explains the disconnect between Australian public opinion on the long running wars the ADF is involved in and the lack of public pressure on government to address these deployments.

This particularly concerns the inability of the Australian Labor Party, whether in government or opposition, to articulate a systematic critical stance about the alliance, including creating or maintaining institutional space to ask the central question about what the national interest is at any given point in relation to the alliance: when are Australian interests genuinely aligned with those of the United States, and when are they not? 'Wedging the ALP' succeeds as a business as usual tactic in Australian politics not just because of the skill of conservative politicians in making ALP policymakers squirm but also because of the high level of ALP self-censorship in asking that question lest it lead to any public break in bipartisanship. The existing high degree of political party bipartisanship on the defence relationship to the United States combines with a restriction of citizen access to informed reporting and commentary in defence and foreign policy to seriously impair the operation of public scrutiny of government policy.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Tanter, Submission to the Defence Sub-Committee, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Inquiry into the Benefits and Risks of a Bipartisan Australian Defence Agreement, as a Basis of Planning For, and Funding of, Australian Defence Capability, 2 November 2017; and 'Bad, Bad BADA (aka Bipartisan Australian Defence Agreement)', *Pearls & Irritations*, 1 March 2018, <https://johnmenadue.com/richard-tanter-bad-bad-bada-aka-bipartisan-australian-defence-agreement/>.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Tanter, Submission to the Defence Sub-Committee, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Inquiry into the Benefits and Risks of a Bipartisan Australian Defence Agreement, as a Basis of Planning For, and Funding of, Australian Defence Capability, 2 November 2017; and 'Bad, Bad BADA (aka Bipartisan Australian Defence Agreement)', *Pearls & Irritations*, 1 March 2018, <https://johnmenadue.com/richard-tanter-bad-bad-bada-aka-bipartisan-australian-defence-agreement/>.

This in part explains the disconnect between Australian public opinion on the long running wars the ADF has been involved in since the 1990s and the lack of public pressure on government to address these deployments.<sup>5</sup> The most striking example of this absence of an Australian institutional capability to ask the core question about the absence or presence of alignment of Australian and United States interests was of course the ADF participation between 2001 and 2021 in the US-led war in Afghanistan. That is being repeated in the case of the decision to acquire nuclear-powered submarines, with even greater potential for catastrophic outcomes for Australia.

Amidst all the sudden mainstream elite hand wringing in the days after the fall of Kabul to the Taliban, there has remarkably little scrutiny of how this came to be: Australia's second longest war over two decades, many billions of dollars thrown away, forty one ADF deaths and 240 seriously wounded, unknown numbers of Afghan dead and mutilated at hands of Australian and other coalition forces, ending in a humiliating NATO and Australian defeat that leaves Afghanistan poorer and more ruined, more divided, and more afflicted by the sources of terrorism than ever before. What was at most a third or fourth order strategic interest for Australia in 2002-3 until Al Qaeda was forced from the country turned after that in a hugely costly and violent negative that was pursued solely out of a strategically counterproductive, intellectually lazy, and politically pusillanimous obeisance to American empire – fact of which 300 million US citizens are wholly unaware – or interested.

'What were they thinking?' is the title of an account by Max Suich, the former editor of the *National Times* and the *Australian Financial Review*, of the sudden and ill-thought through lurch in China policy between 2017 and 2020, based on over a year of patient and persistent inquiry in Canberra. Suich introduced the question by noting that

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<sup>5</sup> 'Australians have remained curiously incurious about the operations which are being conducted in their name. The Government, and the ADF, have argued that public exposure of information about operations risks soldiers' lives, and this seems to have been accepted by the media and by voters as a reason not to press. The result has been a remarkable lack of public information about the wars we are fighting today. For all the talk of the CNN age, Australians have less information today about the wars our soldiers are fighting than we had in Vietnam, or for that matter in the Boer War. And we seem not to care.' Hugh White, [Speech at the launch of the Australian Forces Abroad Briefing Books](https://nautilus.org/publications/books/australian-forces-abroad/security-general/launch-white/), Nautilus Institute at RMIT, 29 June 2009, at <https://nautilus.org/publications/books/australian-forces-abroad/security-general/launch-white/>

‘There has been a note of the casual, she’ll-be-right, the scary shoot-from-the-lip, even insouciance, in the development of our China policy over the past four years.... A former senior official, present at the time the U-turn began, says: “We have no overall objective for the China relationship so there’s no strategy that provides a framework for disciplined official statements. So the government can get away with talking from both sides of the mouth. Peace from the PM, war from others.”’<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Foreign policy management failure - global social system risks and planetary risks as sources of insecurity

Effective understanding of Australia’s national interests must recognize the impinging on the fate of Australians of not just risks deriving from the international system, but also risks deriving from the workings of the system of global social relations, and from risks at a planetary level. A country’s foreign policy should be concerned with three levels of risk, as they impinge on the life and well-being of its citizens. These can be classified as international, global system, and planetary risks. Defence policy is preoccupied with inter-national risks, and of limited or counter-productive application to global system risk or planetary risk.

Australian government preoccupation with the alliance with the United States as the core of our foreign policy and the foundation of defence policy fundamentally distorts the focus and concerns of Australian policy in ways that do not address the actual range of risks to the well-being of Australians we should be expecting our government to consider as matters of great urgency.

*International risks* are the bread and butter of foreign policy – the actions or attitudes or policies of other nation-states that are seen impinging on Australia’s national interests. Defence policy most clearly functions as a distinctive tool to manage to such inter-national

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<sup>6</sup> See Max Suich, ‘War Dance: Reversal’, *The Australian Financial Review*, 17 May 2021, pp. 35-37; ‘China confrontation: what were we thinking?’, *The Australian Financial Review*, 18 May 2021; ‘Hawks’ tough talk makes Australia a stalking horse’, *The Australian Financial Review*, 19 May 2021, pp. 40-41; and ‘Our shaky pillars of wisdom’, *The Australian Financial Review*, 19 May 2021, pp. 41.



risks. Australian foreign and defence policy is consumed by a preoccupation with international military risks addressed by alliance-centred exclusivist multilateralism at best.

*Global system risks* derive from the operations of the wider set of global social relations and the effects they have on the interests of the Australian state and its people. Contemporary global risks with which Australian governments have been at least somewhat cognizant, however ineffectual the subsequent action, concerned include the operations of the global financial system, global information systems maintenance, large-scale forced migration, and pandemic management. For the most part, as the global SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has shown, Australian governments find even cooperative health security approaches difficult to consider, let alone policy approaches founded on both cosmopolitan global analysis and transnational equality of moral considerations.

Other global system deficits with even more serious security implications for Australia include predatory forms of globalisation, global apartheid-like structures of inequality and uneven life chances, unrestricted economic growth and unregulated mobility of capital, regressive and predatory forms of globalization, and the absence of modes of global democracy and legitimate global systems of regulation.<sup>7</sup>

These global system risks are either ignored or almost wholly ineffectually and counter-productively addressed in inappropriate frameworks of 'national security'. The most obvious example for Australia is the sundering of 'illegal border entry' from its global analytical context, including Australia's historical and ongoing military and economic linkages to sources of global conflict that give rise to forced migration and stark inequality of life chances.

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<sup>7</sup> The Australian anthropologist Ghassan Hage emphasizes the wilful misrecognition of national borders behind Australia's response to forced migration, distinguishing a visible set of national borders and a racialised class border which separate different experiences of global mobility – the desperate asylum seeker and the cosmopolitan business executive. Contemporary borders – witness the fetishism of 'sovereignty' in Australia's still extant *Operation Sovereign Borders* – are a key legacy of the colonial period resulting in 'a global apartheid-like situation. These borders 'controlled people's fantasies of a viable life as much as they worked to control and regulate population flows between nation-states, particularly between the former colonies and the West.' Hage could be pointing to the region in which Australia is situated, where 'the whole colonial order of the border function like a global apartheid structure dividing the world into two realities, where race and class combined to define a kind of separate and uneven development whereby the quality of life, of infrastructure, health, and mobility, differed radically?' Ghassan Hage, 'État de siège: A dying domesticating colonialism?', *American Ethnologist*, (2016) Vol. 43, No. 1, pp. 38-49.

Most of these issues require transnational coordination and cooperation to optimize the application of national policy, and large military forces are of little effective use in the management of such risks. However Australian and other governments have on occasion thought otherwise, particularly in the case of forced migration, with often counter-productive consequences. The one global systemic issue that is now widely understood and recognized by the Australian public, if only dimly so by the current government, is climate disruption, where the human causes are widely spread, but the effects necessarily globally salient, and effective solutions necessarily transnationally coordinated within a framework of open multilateral cooperative security.<sup>8</sup>

The least familiar framework of risks, *planetary risks*, derive from developments of the planet-wide biophysical system, including the activities of humans, that impinge significantly on the interests of the people of Australia. Most importantly, such risks often derive from biophysical challenges to equitable or even simply continuing use of the global commons. Climate disruption straddles the two categories of systemic risks deriving from global social relations and increasing evident planetary risks in so far as the consequences of climate disruption in the age of the Anthropocene are now impinging on geological systems, and may not be reversible.

Climate disruption is perhaps the best (though highly imperfectly) recognized current example, but other, less commonly recognized but just as compelling examples include, as the biogeographer Jared Diamond lists in his 2004 book *Collapse: How Societies to Choose to Survive or Fail* include:

- loss of habitat and ecosystem services;
- overfishing;
- loss of biodiversity;
- Soil erosion and degradation;

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<sup>8</sup> For one useful and readable approach to these questions see Jean-Francois Rischard, *High Noon: 20 Global Problems, 20 Years to Solve Them*, ((New York: Basic Books, 2003). Rischard characterises the different challenges of 'sharing our planet' involving issues of the global commons; sharing our humanity, involving issues 'whose size and urgency requires a global commitment'; and those of 'sharing our rulebook', including 'issues needing a global regulatory approach.'

- energy limits;
- freshwater limits;
- photosynthetic capacity limits;
- toxic chemicals;
- alien species introductions;
- climate change;
- population growth; and
- human consumption levels.

All of these systemic elements interact with each other, and all, even now, can be seen to present risks for the Australian population, even if the causes and effects may be seen in Australia, but most certainly go far beyond, and are properly construed as planetary in form.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the nested, highly-interdependent nature of those genuinely complex problems means they are ill-suited to the conceptual and policy strategies, technologies and socio-technical systems that defence or even wider security policy usually provides.<sup>10</sup>

This exploration of the actual range of ‘external’ risks with which an Australian foreign policy should properly be concerned may seem a long way from the question of assessment of the Australian alliance with the United States. But that is precisely the point: the alliance obsession distorts Australian understanding of global system risks and planetary risks.<sup>11</sup>

The real and urgent interests of the Australian people require high-level government engagement with all of these problems, and yet for all recent Australian governments,

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<sup>9</sup> To a listener who asked Jared Diamond the understandable question ‘What is the single most important environmental problem facing the world today?’ Diamond replied ‘The single most important problem is our misguided focus on identifying the single most important problem! That flip answer is essentially correct, because any of the dozen problems if unsolved would do us grave harm, and because they all interact with each other. If we solved 11 of the problems, but not the 12th, we would still be in trouble, whichever was the problem that remained unsolved. We have to solve them all.’

<sup>10</sup> For a development of this approach in East Asia, see Peter Hayes and Richard Tanter, ‘[Global Problems, Complexity, and Civil Society in East Asia](#)’, *Nautilus Institute, Special Report*, 15 July 2015. See policy applications of that approach in Peter Hayes and Yi Kiho (eds.), [Complexity, Security and Civil Society in East Asia](#), Open Book Publishers, 2015), where the paper also appears as Chapter 2.

<sup>11</sup> An early Australian argument on exactly this point is Joseph Camilleri, *Civilization in crisis: human prospects in a changing world*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

foreign policy is framed in extremely conceptually and strategically restrictive and counter-productive ways.

More importantly still, the sources generating all of these wider patterns of international, global system, and planetary risk will continue to develop, most likely giving rise to new and more intense forms of political conflict. Climate disruption, which at present is still early in its now virtually unavoidable known trajectory, will in a relatively short time become the driver of new forms of intense conflict, which governments like Australia will, when they can no longer ignore them, most likely address in wholly dysfunctional terms of the familiar role of a militarized alliance of the rich and powerful 'West' vs The Rest.

#### 4. The shapeshifting alliance and its rationales

The Australia-US alliance is formally rooted in the 1951 ANZUS Treaty, with its well-known limitations of US obligation towards Australia compared with what the parallel treaties between the US and the NATO countries and the US with Japan and South Korea. But even if these limited treaty obligations are acknowledged, the alliance has come to have a remarkably enduring many sided-character, penetrating deep into Australian political, military and social institutions.

The Australian alliance with the United States needs to be understood as having multiple facets:

- as a treaty;
- as a politico-military regime and institutional structure;
- as a powerful ideological element in both US hegemony and Australian society and politics;
- as a facilitator of US military basing presence;
- as an element in transnational intelligence community;
- as complement to a hierarchically organised global economic and political order; and

- as the key to Australian identity as part of the Anglosphere and its viral variant, the Five Eyes intelligence and military alliance.<sup>12</sup>

The Australia-United States alliance (with or without New Zealand) has shown an unusual longevity, in part because of its capacity to shape-shift in the face of changing in response to quite different successive threat identities:

- The treaty originated at the time of the Korean War in response to a US need to ‘normalise’ occupied post-defeat Japan through a peace treaty accompanied by an Australian demand that the US guarantee its security against a possible remilitarised Japan’;
- For four decades of the global Cold War the alliance framed Australia as the southern bastion of the Free World against Communist Soviet Union / Red China.
- During the decade of Australian support for the US war in Vietnam, the alliance was presented as the foundation of regional defence through the domino theory of communist expansion.
- In the decade leading up to 1966, the alliance was presented as a guarantee against unruly Asian nationalism in Australia’s immediate region.
- ANZUS was formally invoked for the first time in the immediate aftermath of the 9.11 attacks, with the initial Afghanistan deployment framed as part of Australia’s commitment to the Global War on Terror.
- The GWOT threat quickly morphed into the threat of WMD proliferation by the Axis of Evil.
- After two decades of failed wars of choice in the Middle East, the alliance threat scenario shifted to perhaps its most serious and threatening object in countering ‘rising totalitarian China’.

Over the seventy years of the alliance, successive Australian governments have responded to these threat identities by offering what by the beginning of this century was a persisting set of rationales for the alliance in terms of benefits to Australia.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Omitting economic issues. For a recent review of the economic dimensions of the alliance, see Vince Scappatura, *The US Lobby and Australian Defence Policy*, (Clayton, VIC.: Monash U.P. 2019).

- The Australian commitment to the alliance is of such value to the United States that the US will come to Australia's assistance in face of military threat, and most certainly if Australia is attacked. This claimed assurance is most clearly stated by Australian governments in the case of prospective threat of nuclear attack.
- Australia preferential access to advanced and highly sensitive military technologies that the United States does not offer to other U.S. allies, including those as important as Japan and South Korea.
- Australian commitment to the alliance, and in particular, Australia's willingness to host major U.S. intelligence and military facilities (aka joint facilities) and accept the consequential risks, results in the US providing Australia with intelligence crucial to Australian strategic objectives which would not otherwise be available to Australia.
- Australia's alliance commitment, including willingness to contribute forces to US military operations, results in Australian access to the 'highest strategic councils in Washington', or at least the possibility to 'gain and maintain influence, and even mere insight into the policy and operational planning of its major ally.'<sup>14</sup>

The alliance has developed in a complex multi-layered story over seven decades. Today it has a distinctive character and framework best described as 'networked' to indicate the deepening and expansion of institutional and strategic and material linkages between the two countries and their militaries.

In comparison to the situation even two decades ago, under today's networked alliance Australian military forces have become as much a niche auxiliary force ready for deployment for global operations according to US requirements as they are defenders of Australian territory. At the same time the joint facilities have a greatly increased role in

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<sup>13</sup> Desmond Ball, 'The strategic essence, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 55, no. 2 (2001).

<sup>14</sup> Stephan Frühling, 'Australian Strategy and Strategic Policy', in Peter J. Dean, Stephan Frühling, and Brendan Taylor (ed.), *Australia's Defence: Towards a New Era?* (Melbourne University Press, 2014), p. 202.

- US nuclear and conventional global conventional military operations,
- US counterterrorism and military drone assassinations,
- US and Japanese missile defence, and
- US planning and operations for space dominance;

*Both the ADF and the joint facilities are key elements in the transformation of Australia's relationship with China both in longterm outlook and in short- and medium-term preparations for war. This shift is epitomised by the trilateral agreement between Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom to build long-range nuclear-powered submarines.*

## 5. The alliance at the heart of Australia's dependent high-technology liberal militarization

One defining quality of the American alliance usually ignored or misrecognized is the imperial character of the United States as a global power. In particular what is important to recognize is not just what Paul Keating spoke of rather coyly recently as 'the rudeness of great powers' when referring to China. That and more has a very long history in the case of the United States. Moreover, the origins of the United States as a settler-colonial country expanding continually westward from the Atlantic coast in land-grabbing genocide are not spoke of in polite company by most media and academic analysts of international relations, who often lose their way in miasmas of 'American exceptionalism'.<sup>15</sup>

Most important of all is to emphasize the American form of empire, beyond the particular form of capitalist economic power it projects and protects, is distinctive for one unusual organisational form of military power deriving from the fusion of two systems.<sup>16</sup> On the one

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<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, given the unfashionable status of realism in contemporary international relations, some of neo-realism's most prominent formateurs have been most plain spoken about the land-grabbing and murderous processes of the expansion of the US 'domestically' and 'abroad'. John Mearsheimer's honesty on such matters (and on the invasion of Iraq and the lamentable influence of the Israel lobby on US policy in the Middle East) compared with many of his 'liberal' colleagues does not limit the harshness of his realism in other respects.

<sup>16</sup> This and the following paragraphs in this section are drawn from Richard Tanter, 'WikiLeaks, Australia and empire', in Felicity Ruby and Peter Cronau, (eds.), *A Secret Australia: Revealed by the WikiLeaks Exposés*, Monash University Press, 2020; and from '[Photo Essay: Landscapes of Secret Power](#)'. Photography by Kristian

hand, there is a readily visible form of material power represented by the more than 1,000 United States military bases outside its own territory, and on the other the less visible but critical and equally potent digital networks of the US government communications and computing infrastructure that the US military calls the Global Information Grid (GIG) – the globe, of course, being in American eyes presumptively US territory.<sup>17</sup> The scale of this imperial enterprise is clear in the Defense Department’s definition of the GIG as:

the globally interconnected, end-to-end set of information capabilities for collecting, processing, storing, disseminating, and managing information on demand to warfighters, policy makers, and support personnel.<sup>18</sup>

Contemporary Australia is a case of dependent high-technology liberal militarization that takes much of its character from the placement in the American empire of bases. Australia exhibits distinctive characteristics pointing to a model of militarization that must look beyond standard concerns with increasing national defence budgets, more and better weapons systems, an ‘exceptionalist’ approach to immigration security, and a predilection for use of military force in international affairs.<sup>19</sup>

In a world and time where militarization is a global norm embedded in globe-spanning military alliances and world-wide networks of foreign military bases, discerning the lineaments of one particular national instance can be both difficult and potentially misleading.

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Laemmle-Ruff, Trevor Paglen, Felicity Ruby, and Desmond Ball. Text by Richard Tanter, *Arena Magazine*, 147, May-June 2017 [[footnoted version](#)].

<sup>17</sup> On US bases outside the United States, see Chalmers Johnson’s classic *Sorrows of Empire* trilogy; the latest edition of the Pentagon real estate guide, Department of Defense, *Base Structure Report Fiscal Year 2015 Baseline*, [www.acq.osd.mil/eie/Downloads/BSI/Base%20Structure%20Report%20FY15.pdf](http://www.acq.osd.mil/eie/Downloads/BSI/Base%20Structure%20Report%20FY15.pdf); and David Vine’s important updating of Johnson in his *Base Nation: How US Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World*, Metropolitan Books, 2015. However, Nick Turse’s 2011 comment is still salutary: ‘There are more than 1,000 US military bases dotting the globe. To be specific, the most accurate count is 1,077. Unless it’s 1,088. Or, if you count differently, 1,169. Or even 1,180. Actually, the number might even be higher. Nobody knows for sure.’ Nick Turse, ‘Empire of Bases 2.0. Does the Pentagon Really Have 1,180 Foreign Bases?’, *Tomgram: The Pentagon’s Planet of Bases*, TomDispatch.com, 9 January 2011, [www.tomdispatch.com/blog/175338/](http://www.tomdispatch.com/blog/175338/).

<sup>18</sup> Department of Defense, *Management of the Department of Defense Information Enterprise (DoD IE)*, Directive No. 8000.01, 10 February 2009, p. 10, <http://www.acqnotes.com/Attachments/DoD%20Directive%208000.1,%20Management%20of%20DoD%20Information%20Resources%20and%20Information%20Technology,%2010%20Feb%202009.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> This section draws on Richard Tanter, ‘Tightly Bound: Australia’s Alliance-Dependent Militarization’, *Global Asia*, Spring 2018, Vol.13 No.1. on liberal militarization, see Srdjan Vucetic, ‘Militarism in the Age of Trump, Part I’, *The Disorder of Things* [Vucetic blog], 17 March 2017, at <https://thedisorderofthings.com/2017/03/17/militarism-in-the-age-of-trump-part-i/>.



In liberal democracies such as Australia, national self-conceptions resist identification with the harsh implications of reliance on or valorization of military force, unless it can be viably represented as defence of freedom, just war, or wars against unspeakable Others.

And in the case of liberal democracies originating in a settler state and ongoing unrecognized conquest of indigenous peoples – think Australia, the United States, Canada, Israel – the racially-inflected violence of the foundations of state-formation and national identity continues to ramify through the default settings of contemporary foreign policy.

All three qualities distinguish the contemporary pattern of Australian militarization from the standard versions of either exceptionalist or liberal militarization.

Over the past half century or more, the standard historical parameters of Australian defence policy have focussed on oscillations around a set of policy polar tensions<sup>20</sup>:

- self-reliance vs imperial or super-power dependence;
- confidence in sufficient warning time to prepare for emerging major threats vs. identity rooted in fear of invasion;
- acceptance of limited resources and influence vs. borrowed grandiosity by association with imperial allies; and
- force structure designed for the defence of continental Australia and the immediate region vs. ‘operations in distant theatres’.

These tension sets derive at root from the anxieties of a small settler-colonial state, uneasily occupying a conquered continent, identifying deeply with its imperial origins on the other side of the world, and fearfully anxious about its relations with its geographical and cultural environment. Identity powerfully structures how the map is read for strategic interest. On

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<sup>20</sup> This formulation draws on Richard Brabin-Smith, *The Heartland of Australia's Defence Policies*, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre Working Paper No. 396, April 2005, at [http://sdsc.bellschool.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/2016-03/WP-SDSC-396\\_0.pdf](http://sdsc.bellschool.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/2016-03/WP-SDSC-396_0.pdf).

the standard Australian reading, 'help' is seen as far away. Serious pursuit of 'self-reliance' is seen a brave gamble.<sup>21</sup>

The historical roots of this pattern of dependent militarization then suggest that hopes for deep change will require a double political movement. One is directed externally and starts from a familiar argument of the need for Australian independence from imperial ties. Former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser emphasized the strategically dependent character of Australia since Federation and before. Fraser was both serious and accurate when he said that he had never lived in an independent Australia.

The other, directed internally, is less familiar – or perhaps better put, is recognized in glimpses, but not accepted at heart as even more compelling, more urgent and more difficult to achieve. This involves a re-forming of national identity which

- is not rooted in the inherently racialized Anglosphere;
- involves open recognition of the foundation of the Australian state in an act of conquest, the consequences of which are still unfolding;
- understands the extent to which the achievements of contemporary Australia rest on a comforting selective historical memory of actual connected and often exploitative history to other parts of the world; and
- builds on the uneven achievements of multiculturalism to build Australian cosmopolitan solidarity with the peoples in the geographical and cultural region in which we live.<sup>22</sup>

## 6. New alliance inflections

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<sup>21</sup> In addition to Brabin-Smith, 'The Heartland of Australia's Defence Policies', two of the most interesting and telling explorations of these issues in recent years are Hugh White's explanation of the strategic thinking behind the 2000 Defence White Paper in which he was closely involved, and Stephan Frühling's lucid and well-informed 2014 discussion of subsequent defence planning. See Hugh White, 'Strategic Interests and Australian Defence Policy: Some Historical and Methodological Reflections', *Security Challenges*, vol. 4, no. 2 (Winter 2008), pp. 63-79; Stephan Frühling, 'Australian Strategy and Strategic Policy'. All three are commenting on or criticizing the 'Defence of Australia' or continentalist approach to Australia defence planning advocated by Paul Dibb in the *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (aka The Dibb Report), March 1986 and Dibb's important methodological monograph, *The Conceptual Basis of Australia's Defence Planning and Force Structure Development*, (ANU, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> Elements of this list draw on the work of the late Patrick Wolfe on settler-colonialism; Ghassan Hage on global apartheid structures; and Gurminder Bhambra, including her 'The Current Crisis of Europe: Refugees, Colonialism, and the Limits of Cosmopolitanism', *European Law Journal* 23 (5): 395–405 (2017).

While the rapid and profound locking of Australia into the frontline of US-coordinated attempted containment of China is the most potent and potentially dangerous development of the networked alliance in recent years, there are other developments and shifts in the character of the alliance over the last two decades that are now clear.

The US-derived mantra of the 'rules-based international order' is one of the key ideological frames of the US containment of China. This frame is an ideological construct of government and media that permits vilification of the actions of some governments seen as hostile to the US, while similar acts by the US itself or its allies are ignored or dismissed as unacceptable claims of 'What about-ism'. The Permanent Court of Arbitration's 2016 ruling against China over its South China Sea constructed islands is an important application of the Convention on the Law of the Sea that is very frequently framed as an example of China's rejection of the rule-based international order. Leaving aside the fact that the US and its Australian ally initiated an illegal war in Iraq, the most important US military base between Africa and Japan, the Diego Garcia Naval Base is a precisely comparable violation of directives from the international legal system by the United Kingdom. But Australia supports and is closely involved in the US resulting from UK/US violation of the 'rules-based international order' without ever seeking its rectification.

## Part II. Eight key foreign and defence problems flowing the alliance

### 1. Consequences of repeated alliance-generated ADF deployments

Australian wars since Federation have almost always been, with very few exceptions, alliance wars far from home. Apart from the two World Wars, most have ended in defeat, stalemate, or disgrace – with an apparent lack of awareness of that frequent fate masked by Defence censorship and a culture of military triumphalism of being on the winning side in two world wars. Reality and its horrors only momentarily breaks through with footage of the last helicopters out of Saigon or the tiny figure of a desperate Afghan civilian falling from one of the last US aircraft out of Kabul.

Table 1. ADF deployments in US wars<sup>23</sup>

Korean War	1950–1953
Vietnam War	1962–1973
Gulf War	1990–1991
Afghanistan War	2001–2021
Iraq War I	2003–2009
Iraq War II	2014–present
Syria	2015–2018
Yemen (naval)	2014–present <sup>24</sup>

The recent exceptions in regions very close to Australia – InterFET in Timor Leste and RAMSI in the Solomon Islands – were ‘stabilisation operations’ – a term redolent with the mixed motives of Australian governments towards those countries. Otherwise, our wars are all, one way or another, wars for empire. None of the deployments of Australian forces listed over

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<sup>23</sup> For discussion of elements of this table see Richard Tanter, ‘[Australia’s Addiction to Alliance War](#)’, *Arena Magazine*, 139 (December 2015), pp. 30-34; ‘[Australia in America’s Third Iraq War](#)’, *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 12, Issue 49, No. 3, December 22, 2014; ‘[Yemen, Australian mercenaries and the shifting sands of Australia–Middle East alliances](#)’, *Arena Magazine*, (155), August 2018; [Memo to Kevin Rudd: Why are we in Afghanistan?](#), *Arena Magazine*, 92, December 2007 – January 2008; [Documenting our forgotten war: Australia in Afghanistan](#), *Arena Magazine* 90, August – September 2007; and ‘[Tightly Bound: Australia’s Alliance-Dependent Militarization](#)’, *Global Asia*, Spring 2018, Vol.13 No.1.

<sup>24</sup>

the past seven decades were a response to primary or even second order Australian strategic interests.

The Afghanistan deployment, the only war to be formally justified under Australia's ANZUS Treaty obligations, began in what *might* have been understandable in the face of US political *force majeure* – the rage of the United States after the 9.11, irrational and misplaced though it was, was probably unstoppable in the short term. The invasion of Afghanistan that followed achieved its primary objective – destroying the Al Qaeda training camps and, for good measure, the Taliban government – in less than half a year. Yet Australian governments year after year deployed troops and supported the United Nations-aided war that followed for two decades.

Afghanistan, the most intense Australian war in the past half century, has involved a high tempo of operations that led to an extraordinary number of three- or six-month rotations of ADF personnel, in many cases repeatedly. Navy frigates and other vessels deployed to the western Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf region are now past their sixtieth six month rotation.

The fundamental issue to assess whether the Australian prosecution of these wars advanced or enhanced Australian national interests. A generation after Vietnam, it became customary in government circles to talk of the Vietnam commitment as a 'mistake', but usually not in terms that carried either any measure of apology to either Australian veterans or the Vietnamese people or serious discussion of how that 'mistake' came to be. After the initial invasion period wiping out the Al Qaeda training camps the protracted Afghanistan deployment came to be justified by successive governments as having three objectives: to build democracy in Afghanistan, to end the threat of resurgent terrorism, and to prevent the country falling into a narco-economy. All three aims failed early and clearly – the last two in fact generating even more negative results in terms of regional terrorism recruiting and a shift from peasant opium production to transnational industrial-scale production and export of heroin. Despite these evident facts of the real state of the war, there was no move to then reassess whether participation in the war had any conceivable contribution to Australia's national interest – other than that of satisfying the US government's notions of 'burden sharing'.

Commitment to the maintenance of the alliance for its own sake overwhelmed any other measure of Australian national or strategic interest.

## 2. Profusion and deepening of US access to Australian military and intelligence bases

In recent years successive Australian governments have been insistent on the joint character of any cooperative activity within Australia with US military forces and intelligence agencies. For example, the ratification of the 2008 treaty concerning US access to the once again joint North West Cape facility confirmed that the treaty ‘includes a requirement that U.S. use of the Station be in accordance with the Australian Government’s policy of full knowledge and concurrence.’<sup>25</sup>

Another Australian government mantra, usually from the Defence Minister, has been that ‘There are no US bases in this country.’ This is not correct. This is not just a politician being economical with the truth, but in fact a complete misrepresentation of strategic reality, which is in fact one of fundamental and inherent asymmetrical cooperation between the United States and Australia.

Of course, there are differences of degree as to which military and intelligence bases on Australian soil can be appropriately regarded as ‘joint facilities. If you like, there are degrees of ‘jointness’. The Australian government has only specifically identified three bases as joint facilities: the Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap, the US Air Force operated nuclear detonation seismic monitoring network at the Joint Geological and Geophysical Research Station, and the HANDS (High Accuracy Network Determination System) Ground Station Learmonth on North West Cape. The Australian government has never provided a full and accurate list of joint facilities, but the statements identifying the three just mentioned imply that there are others, as is certainly the case.

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<sup>25</sup> [Australia-United States Exchange of Letters Relating to Harold E. Holt Naval Communications Station](#), AUSMIN 2010, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. One of the best discussion of ‘Full Knowledge and Concurrence’ is in Graeme Dobell, ‘Australia-East Asia/US Relations: Election plus Marines, Joint Facilities and the Asian Century’, *Comparative Connections*, September 2013, at <http://cc.pacforum.org/2013/09/election-plus-marines-joint-facilities-asian-century/>.

In part, this is a matter of in what sense they are joint.<sup>26</sup> Regarding the major actual joint facilities such as Pine Gap and North West Cape and the recent extensions to the Australian Defence Satellite Communications Station at Kojarena near Geraldton. If the facility was built by the United states, paid for by the United States, and can only operate effectively as part of the US globally distributed technological system, then it is best to regard those as US facilities to which Australia has a greater or lesser degree of access.

In some cases, there is a distinction between the nominal 'joint management' of a facility, and the actual unilateral control by the United States. A case in point is the Joint Geological and Geophysical Research Station (JGGRS). Established in great secrecy in 1955 by the US Air Force, the JGGRS was made a joint facility under the Fraser government, and today is nominally jointly managed and operated by GeoScience Australia and by the USAF's secretive Air Force Technical Applications Agency (AFTAC). In fact, GeoScience Australia has no role in operations at the seismic station, provides no capital or operating budget, and has no permanent staff onsite. Five or six AFTAV personnel run and maintain the station, the data from which goes to AFTAC Headquarters in Florida, to GeoScience Australia, and to the International Monitor System (IMS) of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO) in Vienna. As a signatory to the CTBT Australia required to maintain the JGGRS, which as identified in the treaty annex as Primary Seismic Station 03 (PS03). However, while Australia has the right to locate staff at the station, the facility is run entirely AFTAC's Detachment 421.

However, in understanding the relationship between the US alliance and military and intelligence facilities in Australia, it may be misleading to concentrate only on these well-known examples. In a recent survey, US military and intelligence agencies have been found to have access to more than fifty Australian defence facilities. In some cases, this access was relatively minor, but in most cases it was considerable.

This represents a shift back to the situation from the 1950s to the 1970s when, as Desmond Ball documented in *A Suitable Piece of Real Estate: American Installations in Australia*, there

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<sup>26</sup> For an important discussion of the bases, see Felicity Ruby, 'Silent partners: US bases in Australia', *Australian Foreign Affairs*, 8 (February 2020).

were a large number of little-known US facilities in Australia. Over time, many of those were closed as US requirements changed. That situation has now changed again.

One example is the high technology cluster of facilities to which all but one of which the US has access on the Exmouth Peninsula and North West Cape. Most of these facilities are longstanding, with US access reaching back to the early 1960s. The Space Surveillance Radar and Telescope have only recently been constructed, with the SSR now operating under the control of Remote Surveillance Unit No. 1 (RSU 1) at RAAF Base Edinburgh near Adelaide, and the SST close to Initial Operating Capacity, also with RSU 1. But both supply space situational data and space object identification on satellites and on space debris to Combined Space Operations (CSpOC, under the United States Space Command's Combined Force Space Component Command. Some are huge facilities like the VLF transmitter; the HANDS Ground Station Learmonth is the size of a house block.

In some cases, US access is total; in others substantively joint, and in other cases still Australian constructed and operated facilities, such as the Defence High Frequency System Stations, collaborate closely with their US equivalents, and are in important respects closely integrated, with access for US personnel.



Table 2. North West Cape defence locations with US access  
(from north to south)

Facility	Coordinates	Remarks
Area A, VLF transmitter antenna, Naval Communications Station Harold E. Holt	-21.816549°, 114.165868°	US constructed; US access; joint management
Area B, Base Administrative Area, Naval Communications Station Harold E. Holt	-21.886593°, 114.130581°	US constructed; US access; joint management
Space Surveillance Radar System, Naval Communications Station Harold E. Holt	-21.888860°, 114.130111°	US developed and constructed; Australian paid some installation cost; remotely operated from RAAF Edinburgh; data to Combined Space Operations Center (CSpOC), Vandenberg AFB, CA.
Space Surveillance Telescope, Naval Communications Station Harold E. Holt	-21.8957°, 114.0899°	US developed and constructed; Australian paid some installation cost; remotely operated from RAAF Edinburgh; data to Combined Space Operations Center (CSpOC), Vandenberg AFB, CA.
Defence High Frequency System Transmitter Station, Exmouth	-21.906818°, 114.132060°	Australian constructed, paid for, and operated. US access and US high frequency system integration
HANDS Ground Station Learmonth	-22.218294°, 114.102356°	Wholly US space situational awareness telescopes remotely and controlled from USAF Kikei supercomputing space surveillance complex, Maui, HA.
Learmonth Solar Observatory	-22.219239°, 114.103259°	Joint operation by Bureau of Meteorology and the USAF Detachment 1 of the 2nd Weather Squadron, Solar Observing Optical Network and Radio Solar Telescope Network, 557 <sup>th</sup> Weather Wing, Offutt AFB
Learmonth Space Situational Awareness (SSA) Observatory, Electro Optical Systems	-22.220436°, 114.103602°	Electro-Optical Systems, Canberra-based Australian technology company, partnering with Lockheed Martin; located on Defence property.
RAAF Base Learmonth	-22.234317°, 114.080960°	HANDS Ground Station Learmonth, Learmonth Solar Observatory and Learmonth Space Situational Awareness (SSA) Observatory co-located on RAAF Learmonth.
Learmonth Air Weapons Range	-22.449045°, 113.811018°	US use not verified.
Defence High Frequency System Receiver Station, Rough Range	-22.336271°, 114.048547°	Australian constructed, paid for, and operated. US access and US high frequency system integration

### 3. Heightening the involvement in nuclear war

Australia has three well-known direct connections to the prospect of nuclear war: one involving nuclear weapons in the direct defence of Australia, another through Australian defence and intelligence facilities providing direct support for US global nuclear operations in war in several different ways; and the third, as a consequence of the second, leading to a high likelihood that one or more of those defence facilities will become targets of nuclear missile attack in time of major war.

#### 3.1 Extended nuclear deterrence

Since 1994 all Australian governments have reiterated a stated defence policy of reliance in the face of nuclear threats on what they claim are US assurances of nuclear protection. This is a declaratory doctrine, announced to other countries and the Australian population of reliance on US extended nuclear deterrence. Aside from questions of the limited credibility of claimed nuclear threats or their probability or the unquestioned need to counter such threats with a nuclear (albeit borrowed) response, no Australian government has ever publicly acknowledged that this policy of extended nuclear deterrence rests on the prospect that an Australian government would expect the US to attack major cities in China or Indonesia or elsewhere with large numbers of high explosive yield nuclear weapons. In such countries, there is no way that nuclear weapons could be used effectively in line with US nuclear doctrine without reaching genocidal scale. Even if the objects of attack were not cities and their populations as such (in US doctrine terms 'counter value targets'), immediate mass death on a scale not seen since those that occurred over a number of years in the world wars would be inevitable since the alternative US doctrine of counterforce targeting (attacking militarily significant facilities) often includes targets in urban areas.

Extended nuclear deterrence means that the plan is that Australia would ask the US to commit genocide in its defence. Next to this unspoken horror, the other often noted problems of Australian extended nuclear deterrence policy – that there is no such US assurance to Australia, and that the policy is a potent encouragement to any neighbouring country to imitate Australia's apparent belief in the military utility of nuclear weapons – may seem less consequential. Except that, once again, no Australian government has ever publicly

and transparently tried to explain how this policy advances the national interests of Australians or sits with Australians' sense of themselves. Possibly for the very good reason that neither attempts at explanation would be possible without either ridicule or shame.

In fact, what might be called the Australian model of extended nuclear deterrence, as distinct from that of the European NATO countries, or the US East Asian allies, South Korea and Japan, has some very distinctive characteristics.<sup>27</sup> In summary, the Australian model of extended nuclear deterrence has a number of distinctive characteristics:

- an offshore location of potential deterrent force, rather than US nuclear weapons in Australia;
- a lack of an identifiable or identified direct nuclear threat;
- Australian hosting of United States nuclear targeting-related intelligence facilities justified as Australian contribution to maintenance of global nuclear stability;
- a concomitant Australian government secret acceptance of high probability enemy nuclear targeting of at least some of those facilities in the event of major war;
- a lack of certainty about the standing of the END assurance and its character in American eyes;
- an explicit Australian warning to US that reliance on END avoids the need for Australia to develop its own nuclear weapons;
- a profound and persisting lack of Australian public awareness of these issues.

More sharply, but accurately Australian government policy of reliance on US extended nuclear deterrence against nuclear threats is absurd, obscene and strategically reckless':

- **absurd** – because there is no public assurance from the United States to Australia, and hence literally 'in-credible'

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<sup>27</sup> For a research discussion see Richard Tanter, "[Just in Case": Extended Nuclear Deterrence in the Defense of Australia](http://nautilus.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/2011cJust-in-Case201d--Pacific-Focus.pdf)", *Pacific Focus*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (April 2011), at <http://nautilus.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/2011cJust-in-Case201d--Pacific-Focus.pdf>; and, more polemically, 'Absurd, obscene and reckless – American nuclear weapons in the defence of Australia', *Dissent* (Australia), no. 42, Spring 2013. For powerful and fundamental critique of Australian END policy by former Assistant Secretary of defence see Allan Behm, 'Extended Deterrence and Extended Nuclear Deterrence in a Pandemic World', *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*, Volume 4, 2021 - Issue sup1, pp. 135-156, at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/25751654.2021.1880770>.

- **obscene** – because what we call capacity for nuclear deterrence by the US are Weapons of Mass destruction in the hands of others; and
- **reckless** strategically, because Australian reliance on borrowed nuclear protection must surely encourage other neighbouring countries to consider the value of acquiring their own nuclear weapons.

### 3.2 Pine Gap: the primary US nuclear command, control, and communications link

All states possessing nuclear weapons must have the means to exercise command about their use, to control the behaviour of the weapons platforms themselves, and to reliably communicate on both matters. Nuclear command, control and communications (NC3) systems that are critical enabling components of nuclear attack planning and operations. In the for the most powerful Nuclear Possessing States, and especially, the United States, these systems are typically global in character, both in terms of distribution around the world (and in space), and in the sense of network space.<sup>28</sup>

Paul Bracken recently summarized the global geographic sense of the current US NC3I situation as follows:

‘Nine countries now possess nuclear weapons. Five more countries (Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Turkey) have U.S. nuclear weapons positioned on their territory. Other nations are so critically involved with U.S. nuclear operations through warning, intelligence, and missile defense that for all practical purposes they are part of the U.S. NC3 system (Japan, the ROK, Australia, Taiwan). This gives at least eighteen countries in total involved in nuclear or closely related NC3. Globally, no less than thirty six states are directly or indirectly involved in the projection of nuclear threat against other states (namely, the U.S. and its NATO and Pacific allies, plus the other eight nuclear armed states, all dependent in one way or another on nuclear command and control systems).’<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Alternatively, NC3I, to include intelligence systems that enable nuclear operations.

<sup>29</sup> This is of course, only a glimpse of Bracken’s concerns in his response to a large set of papers at a Nautilus Institute workshop on NC3 (Bracken 2019). See also Hayes et al. (2019) and numerous studies published as Nautilus Institute [Special Reports](#) in 2019.

As Bracken notes, four of these U.S. allies lie within the Asia-Pacific, all of which have defence policies openly reliant on U.S. extended nuclear deterrence, and all, more to the point, as Bracken puts it, 'part of the U.S. NC3 system'.

In Australia, the Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap near Alice Springs plays a critical role in US NC3 operations, and a direct role in US planning for nuclear operations.

In broad terms, Pine Gap is one of the largest US intelligence facilities outside the United States, with three main functions.<sup>30</sup>

Firstly, Pine Gap serves as a command, control, and data downlink ground station to US signals intelligence satellites in geosynchronous orbits above the equator, collecting, monitoring, and downlinking for processing and analysis a wide range of types of electronic emissions within its satellites' 'footprints' covering most of the earth's surface from the mid-Pacific to eastern Africa.

Secondly, it carries out the reverse mode of signals collection, with ground antennas at Pine Gap intercepting, monitoring and analysing downlinks from a range of types of foreign satellites in geosynchronous orbit, principally communications satellites owned by both allies and adversaries.<sup>31</sup>

Thirdly, it hosts a somewhat separate Relay Ground Station which relays command and control instructions and downlinks data from another set of US satellites in geosynchronous orbit carrying large infrared telescopes that detect the heat bloom of the launch of ballistic

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<sup>30</sup> For a clear exposition of Pine Gap, its history, and its functions, see in particular Kieran Finnane, *Peace Crimes: Pine Gap, National Security and Dissent*, (University of Queensland Press, 2020). Richard Tanter, '[Our poisoned heart: the transformation of Pine Gap](#)', *Arena Magazine*, No. 144, October 2016 provides a non-technical introduction.

<sup>31</sup> Other activities at Pine Gap are of considerable importance to Southeast Asia, as shown clearly in the revelations by Edward Snowden in 2013-14 that Australia's signals intelligence agency bugged the cell phones of the Indonesian president, his wife and other senior officials, and on other occasions intercepted the communications of Indonesian trade official negotiating with the United States and offered the product to the US. Pine Gap, along with other Australian listening stations made this possible. See the discussion in Richard Tanter, 'Indonesia, Australia and the Edward Snowden Legacy: Shifting asymmetries of power', *The Asia Pacific Journal*, Vol. 12, Issue 10, No. 3, March 10, 2014, at <https://apjif.org/2014/12/10/Richard-Tanter/4088/article.html>.

missiles, in order to both provide early warning of missile attack and to assist in US, Japanese and South Korean missile defence targeting.<sup>32</sup>

Table 2. Pine Gap's main nuclear weapons roles

1. Nuclear attack planning support: its 'big ears' in space and on the ground providing the locations and characteristics of enemy radars and air defences; and collaboration in tracking mobile ICBMs and missile submarines at sea.
2. Early warning: its infrared satellites detecting enemy nuclear missile launches, giving the US a few minutes of warning of nuclear attack.
3. Nuclear second strike targeting support: detects which enemy missile silos (and possibly, missiles on submarines) have been fired and which have not, and are therefore to be targeted in a US second nuclear strike.
4. Missile defence: when Pine Gap detects the first seconds of missile launches and calculates the missiles' likely trajectories, it passes the information to the US missile defence systems, cueing their fire radars to search a tiny portion of the sky where the missiles are gathering enormous speed. Cued by Pine Gap, and if they work as the Pentagon and the arms manufacturers advertise, US missile defences have an improved chance of firing their own missiles to hit and destroy the enemy missiles.
5. Possible contribution to verification of particular (not all) arms control agreements by detecting characteristics of adversary test missiles.

Pine Gap's nuclear connections are multiple, but the most important and immediate way in which hosting the facility would impede Australian compliance with the TPNW involves the Relay Ground Station and its linkage to a number of large and powerful Overhead Persistent Infrared (OPIR) satellites over the Pacific and Indian Oceans.<sup>33</sup> The same infrared satellites that provide the United States with early warning of missile attack, and which are critical to US and Japanese missile defence, in time of war also provide US strategic nuclear planners with intelligence as to which adversary missiles silos have launched their missiles and are consequently empty, and those which have not, and are consequently candidate US

<sup>32</sup> See the research papers on Pine Gap by Desmond Ball, Bill Robinson and Richard Tanter collected as [The Pine Gap Project](#). Ball and Tanter conducted a parallel research project on Japanese electronic intelligence and US electronic intelligence in Japan. The books and papers in that Japan-centred project are collected as [The Japan SIGINT Project](#). For one approach to some of the nuclear war implications of that research see Robert Ayson and Desmond Ball, '[Can a Sino-Japanese War Be Controlled?](#)' *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 56, No. 6, (2014) pp. 135-166.

<sup>33</sup> Pine Gap is currently linked to both legacy Defense Support Program satellites and Space-Based Infra-Red System (SBIRS) infrared satellites. A third generation of OPIR satellites is in development, involving expansion of Pine Gap in preparation for launch in the next five years.

targets.<sup>34</sup> The data downlinked from the OPIR satellites is passed automatically through the Relay Ground Station at Pine Gap to the OPIR Mission Control Station in Colorado in near real time to feed targeting plans of a US second nuclear strike.<sup>35</sup>

### 3.3 Australian and joint facilities as nuclear targets

One of the enduring public concerns of the hosting of United States intelligence and military facilities in Australia, whether under the heading of “joint facilities” or otherwise, has been the possibility of a nuclear missile attack on one or more of these facilities in the event of major conflict between the United States and another nuclear power.<sup>36</sup> These fears derive from an understanding that at different times over the past half century one or more of these facilities are of such importance to the US ability to conduct nuclear operations that their elimination with a long-range nuclear missile strike would be a high priority for an enemy.

During the Cold War, at least three bases were considered by both independent analysts and by the Australian government as highly likely Soviet missile targets if a United States – Soviet nuclear war progressed beyond a limited use of tactical (i.e., short-range, low-yield) nuclear weapons: the North West Cape naval communications base, the Nurrungar ground station for U.S. early warning satellites, and the Pine Gap signals intelligence base.

Nurrungar was closed in 2000 and replaced by the installation at Pine Gap of an automatically and remotely operated Relay Ground Station for the early warning geostationary satellites.

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<sup>34</sup> There is a parallel but less well-researched second-strike targeting issue concerning assessment by the OPIR satellites of which adversary nuclear missile submarines have launched weapons. That involves an assessment of the extent to which the United States was certain of the location of those submarines, and how precisely. Note the claim by senior US figures that in the latter days of the Cold War the United States was certain of the locations of Soviet SSBNs at any given time. See Austin Long and Brendan Rittenhouse Green, ‘Stalking the Secure Second Strike: Intelligence, Counterforce, and Nuclear Strategy’, *Journal of Strategic Studies* Vol. 38 (2012), Nos. 1-2, pp. 38-73.

<sup>35</sup> The history and characteristics of the Relay Ground Station are discussed in Richard Tanter, *Hiding from the light: The establishment of the Joint Australia-United States Relay Ground Station at Pine Gap*, Special Report, Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainability, 2 November 2019, at <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/hiding-from-the-light-the-establishment-of-the-joint-australia-united-states-relay-ground-station-at-pine-gap/?view=pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> This section draws on Richard Tanter, ‘Possibilities and effects of a nuclear missile attack on Pine Gap’, *Australian Defence Facilities*, Nautilus Institute, 30 October 2013, at <https://nautilus.org/briefing-books/australian-defence-facilities/possibilities-and-effects-of-a-nuclear-missile-attack-on-pine-gap/>.

North West Cape's strategic character changed in the 1980s when the United States navy replaced its Polaris missile submarines with larger submarines carrying missiles with much greater range. As a result, these missile submarines could be deployed further from the Soviet Union, particularly in the Pacific Ocean. The Harold E Holt Naval Communications Station at North West Cape in Western Australia is a longstanding Very Low Frequency communication link to submerged US submarines, historically including both strategic ballistic missile submarines and nuclear-armed attack submarines. The extent to which this remains the case for North West Cape on both counts is an ongoing research question.

There would be a strong argument for calling for a precautionary approach, to the HEH Naval Communications Station, and presuming that it retains some NC3 roles, and could remain a reasonably high priority target, most likely with nuclear weapons, in time of major conflict. Moreover, two important new joint US-Australian facilities at North West Cape, the Space Surveillance Radar and the Space Surveillance Telescope play an important role in US planning for space war-fighting operations. However, at this point it is not clear that negating these activities would be a high priority for a nuclear-armed adversary.

Pine Gap, on the other hand, remains a likely priority target for a Chinese missile strike in the event of a major China – United States conflict, both because of its role as a remote ground station for early warning satellites in the Defence Support Program (DSP) and Space Based Infra-Red Satellite (SBIRS) systems, and its larger role as a command, control, downlink, and processing facility for US signals intelligence satellites in geo-stationary orbit.

In the case of US-Russia major war, the probability of a Russian nuclear strike is much higher, given the Russian abundance of suitable missiles, and China's relative paucity, considered against its likely list of priority targets.

The Australian government has long known that Pine Gap, and earlier, Nurrungar and North West Cape, were highly likely targets of a nuclear attack in the event of a major nuclear war involving the United States.



#### 4. Erosion of rule of law in foreign and defence policy

The high operational tempo of the ADF in recent years for what is in international terms, a small military force, has reportedly had serious negative effects on the ADF in a variety of ways. The Australian community is just beginning to comprehend the scale of serious mental health effects of war service on veterans, including those who served in Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>37</sup> The degrading and criminal behaviour of leadership in ADF Special Forces deployed to Afghanistan documented in the Cromptvoets report and the Bretherton Inquiry can in part be attributed to both the tempo of operations over a long period and the integration of Australian special forces into US command in Afghanistan.<sup>38</sup>

In foreign policy more generally, the collaboration of Australian in the illegal attack on Iraq in 2003 is well-known. Australia's emphatic framing of the Chinese occupation and construction of islands in the Paracels and the Spratleys in the South China as illegal under international law is often over-stated in legal terms. More importantly here, the Australian government's willful refusal to note, let alone criticize, the much more clearly illegal forced displacement of Chagos Islanders from Diego Garcia, and the subsequently provision of the island to the United States as a major military base (accessed by Australian forces) is a brazen collusion in the trampling of international law and corrosion of good faith in international relations.

#### 5. Australia in Global NATO

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<sup>37</sup> Important though this belatedly recognition is, veterans of earlier Australian wars faced comparable challenges, with in many cases effects felt lifelong and over several generations through family trauma. Accounting for and recognizing the full societal costs of war should be a mandated part of national interest assessment of military commitments.

<sup>38</sup> Samantha Cromptvoets, *Special Operations Command culture and interactions: Perceptions, reputation and risk*, January 2016, at [https://afghanistandinquiry.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-11/SOCOMD-Culture-and-Interactions-Insights-and-Reflection-Jan-16\\_0.pdf](https://afghanistandinquiry.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-11/SOCOMD-Culture-and-Interactions-Insights-and-Reflection-Jan-16_0.pdf); Samantha Cromptvoets, *Bringing the truth to light: My account of the review into Special Operations Command Culture*, Rapid Context, (n.d.), at <https://www.rapidcontext.com.au/dr-cromptvoets-statement/>; and Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force Afghanistan Inquiry Report (Bretherton Report), Commonwealth of Australia, 2020 (Public release version), at <https://afghanistandinquiry.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-11/IGADF-Afghanistan-Inquiry-Public-Release-Version.pdf>. See also Allan Behm, *War Crimes: Where does ultimate responsibility lie? Only a Royal Commission will determine the answer*, The Australia Institute, December 2020, at <https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/war-crimes-where-does-ultimate-responsibility-lie-only-a-royal-commission-will-determine-the-answer/>.

As noted above, the Australian participation in US-led wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan clearly contributed to a deepening integration of Australia into United States military strategy and operations.

Australia's war in Afghanistan has finished after almost twenty years. Not Australia's longest war, as is usually said, but certainly Australia's longest war abroad. The war ended in yet another defeat in a ground war for the United States and its allies. For Australia the war ended in the double disgrace of confirmed ADF war crimes against Afghan civilians and the year-long agony of Canberra's inability to face up to its minimal human obligations to provide harbour to Afghans who served with Australian forces.

The war was catastrophic for the poorest countries in Asia, and almost wholly counterproductive for Australia – 41 Australians dead, more than 200 seriously wounded physically, many more again suffering the psychological consequences, and a small but potent virus of brazen criminality has tainted the collective psyche of our social forces.

Beyond these tragic and well-noted disasters, the Afghanistan war has had two important strategic consequences for Australia – deepening and expanding the degree of integration and cooperation with other countries, allies old and new.

Most obviously closer than ever direct integration of the ADF and US-linked military and intelligence facilities to United States global planning and operations. The Morrison government is following the strategic mindset inherited from the Gillard and Rudd governments of clinging ever more closely, repeatedly seeking favour with the United States by offering more Australian military resources and diplomatic capital even before the US asks.

But through the Afghanistan and Iraq wars Australia embraced new strategic partners in Europe and Asia. The Afghanistan war was fought under the banner – and command of NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, and what it formally describes as its Asian 'partners across the globe' to make up the "NATO+4". Not only did Australia, Japan, [South Korea](#) and New Zealand all contribute forces to the Afghanistan war, but each now has individual cooperation partnerships with NATO, with Australia rising up the ranks to the status as a

NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partner, together with Finland, Sweden, Georgia and Jordan. This brings the Australian Defence Minister and Chief of Defence Force into NATO's annual main planning meetings, but also into the heart of modern operational planning, NATO's Partnership Interoperability Initiative. [Australia's enrolment in the Partnership Interoperability Initiative](#) means that the ADF 'can contribute to future crisis management, including NATO-led operations and, where applicable, to the NATO Response Force'. If all this has the sound of the US alliance mantra of *interoperability* that's because NATO is at heart an American-led organisation.

## 6. Entanglement in US-auspiced network of second-tier military alliance

Beneath the familiar major US alliances of NATO in Europe and the hub and spokes alliances of the Pacific with Japan, South Korea, and Australia, the US has been encouraging the formation of *second tier alliances* amongst its junior partners and possible future major alliance candidates.

Australia has built four of these second-level quasi-alliance partnerships with American blessing: with NATO as mentioned; directly with France, with Japan, and with India. And then there is the Quad – the rejuvenated Quadrilateral Security Dialogue involving the US, Japan, Australia and India with a clear agenda of containing China.

### *India*

Of these new Australian best friends only India is not a NATO member or 'NATO global partner' – but it may soon be [in one guise or another](#). In 2020 Australia and India signed the [Australia-India Mutual Logistics Support Arrangement](#) together with the Defence Science and Technology Implementing Arrangement. The Logistics Arrangements gives [Indian warships and aircraft access to Australian bases](#), including the port of Darwin and its airbase, RAAF Learmonth, and the Cocos Islands. Indian forces, along with those from Japan and the US, now regularly participate in a number of major joint air, naval and ground force exercises in Australia. In 2017 India signed a similar mutual logistics agreement with the United States to give it access to the key US bases at Diego Garcia, to US Persian Gulf bases, and even Guam. A year later, India and France signed a mutual base access and logistics agreement.

## France

In May 2018 Australia and France signed a mutual logistics support agreement between the ADF and the French Armed Forces, giving French forces access to Australian bases and materials for resupply for virtually all French military needs in the Pacific and Indian Oceans except weapons systems and missiles.<sup>39</sup> In December 2019 the Australian Marine Centre provided [substantial repairs to the French frigate \*Astrolabe\*](#) normally based at Reunion. In April this year, Australian warships took part in the [French-aided Indian Ocean Exercise \*La Pérouse\*](#) with Indian, Japanese and US ships, with 50-70 other ships and submarines all together. In 2016 Australia and France signed an agreement to facilitate intelligence sharing.

Somewhat unusually, the Australia-France logistics agreement specifically singled out authorised arrangements for mutual logistical support between Australian Defence Force and the French Armed Forces New Caledonia.<sup>40</sup>

Australia, India and France are currently developing a coordinated and to some degree integrated approach to Indian Ocean maritime surveillance – with US approval and support. Indian and French access to Australian bases including at HMAS Stirling, Cocos Island, Darwin, and Learmonth will support these operations.

Together with a range of agreements with a large number of countries on intelligence cooperation and cyber-security, these Australian Tier-2 alliances constitute another case of US-aided exclusivist multilateralism. These Tier-2 alliances, with the Quad as a further institutional and political bracing, each contributing to US-led opposition to China in multiple respects, point to a complication facing thinking about forms of movement beyond the American alliance.

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<sup>39</sup> In 2018, India and France signed a mutual base access and logistics agreement.

<sup>40</sup> This section was written before the cancellation of the Australian contract with France to build *Attack*-class submarines.

## 7. Debilitating effects of procurement of high-technology defence systems to meet distorted operational requirements

At the time of writing, the Australian decision to cancel the French submarine contract has prompted extraordinary domestic and international concern, especially about its origins. Australian decisions to align strategically and technologically with US plans for the use of Australian long-range hunter-killer nuclear submarines in US planning for war with China.<sup>41</sup>

It is worth recalling the first round of defence doctrine contradictions embodied in the protracted and intense [intra-government debate](#) about replacing an ageing small submarine fleet.<sup>42</sup>

Almost everything about the Abbott government's project to spend up to \$40 billion on twelve new submarines was breathtakingly wrongheaded, hazardous strategically and profligate financially. The process of deciding which country and company was to be lead builder was a zigzag without logic, born of prime-ministerial survival tactics, secret undertakings given domestically and abroad, and intense lobbying in the shadows by corporations, embassies and different factions of the defence bureaucracy. The process was held hostage by a typically Australian junior-alliance-partner amalgam of US pressure, 'unforced' Canberra policy preference for maximum weight to be given to alliance

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<sup>41</sup> My views on strategic aspects of the nuclear submarine project and the forever alliance are explained in Philip Adams, 'AUKUS: Do nuclear submarines mean nuclear war?', *Late Night Live*, Radio National, 20 September 2021, at <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/latenightlive/aukus-and-nuclear-escalation/13549306>. See also Allan Behm, 'Nuclear Submarines Transform Pandora's Box into a Can of Worms', 16 September 2021, at <https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/nuclear-submarines-transform-pandoras-box-into-a-can-of-worms/>; Allan Behm, 'Scott Morrison's Giant Nuclear Election Ploy', *NAPSNet Policy Forum*, 17 September 2021, at <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/scott-morrison-s-giant-nuclear-election-ploy/>; Yudono Yanuar, 'Australia Bangun Armada Kapal Selam Nuklir, Indonesia Prihatin', *Tempo*, 17 September 2021, at <https://dunia.tempo.co/read/1507303/australia-bangun-armada-kapal-selam-nuklir-indonesia-prihatin>; Sébastien Philippe, 'The new Australia, UK, and US nuclear submarine announcement: a terrible decision for the nonproliferation regime', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 17 September 2021, at <https://thebulletin.org/2021/09/the-new-australia-uk-and-us-nuclear-submarine-announcement-a-terrible-decision-for-the-nonproliferation-regime/>; Tariq Rauf, 'Australia's Nuclear-Powered Submarines Will Risk Opening a Pandora's Box of Proliferation', *Toda Peace Institute*, 19 September 2021, at <https://toda.org/global-outlook/australias-nuclear-powered-submarines-will-risk-opening-a-pandoras-box-of-proliferation.html>. Philip Adams, 'AUKUS: Do nuclear submarines mean nuclear war?', *Late Night Live*, Radio National, 20 September 2021, at <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/latenightlive/aukus-and-nuclear-escalation/13549306>.

<sup>42</sup> This section is drawn from Richard Tanter, '[The \\$40 billion submarine pathway to Australian strategic confusion](#)', Nautilus Institute, *NAPSNet Policy Forum*, 20 April 2015, at <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/the-40-billion-submarine-pathway-to-australian-strategic-confusion/>.

maintenance, and an expected—indeed, hoped for—Australian niche role in US–Japanese conflict with China.

In 2016 with the Turnbull government committed \$39 billion to build twelve 4,000 tonne conventional diesel-electric submarines based on a [DCNS \[now Naval Group\]-Thales design](#) derived from the French *Barracuda*-class nuclear submarine. The \$25 - \$40 bn budget for the Future Submarine program was larger than the \$29 billion 2014–15 budget for all of Australia’s defence activities, including other major capital expenditures and ongoing operations in Afghanistan, Iraq. By mid-2021 the estimated costs of the Future Submarine almost doubled again to \$90 bn. with a serious possibility that disputes over design changes and manufacturing location could lead to cancellation of the entire program.<sup>43</sup>

The alliance context of the submarine decision overlaid doctrinal disagreements for a submarine capability designed for defense of the continental sea/air gap and archipelagic Southeast Asian areas of direct strategic interest to Australia appeared to be trumped by advocacy rooted in alliance concerns for capacity to conduct very long-range coalition-support operations centering on a blockade of Chinese waters – a choice with considerable consequences for design requirements and for the Australian strategic relationship with China.

Some defence analysts expressed deep concern about this amalgam of pork-barrelling, budgetary profligacy, and strategic incoherence. One of them, the respected naval analyst Andrew Davies envisaged three possible applications for an Australian submarine force and was deeply sceptical about two of them. One would involve a war against another middle power, and another a war against a major power without the involvement of the United States. While these, argued Davies, ‘are...in the category of “unlikely but not completely incredible”’, he dismissed both. A putative sea-denial role for submarines against ‘a major (and nuclear armed power)’—i.e., China—without the United States is, for him, close to absurd to think about.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Andrew Tillett, 'New pressures emerge in French submarine fight', *Australian Financial Review*, 14 May 2021, at <https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/new-pressure-emerge-in-french-submarine-fight-20210513-p57rid>.

<sup>44</sup> Andrew Davies, *Presentation to the Submarine Institute of Australia*, November 2012, at [https://www.aspi.org.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/17336/Davies-SIA-November-2012-edited-for-website-NS.pdf](https://www.aspi.org.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/17336/Davies-SIA-November-2012-edited-for-website-NS.pdf).

Davies' eloquent dismissal of the perennially invoked Australian prospect of war with a regional middle power (the usual candidate being Indonesia) is memorable:

'We have no abiding enmities, no simmering territorial disputes and no pissing contests worth mentioning. In fact, our part of the world looks more coherent today than it has for a long time. If anything, our collective interests are converging rather than diverging. And even with the ADF we have today, we have enough denial capability to make the power projection task of any would-be hostile middle power formidably difficult. In short, there's no reason for any middle power to want to fight us, and no obvious way for them to do so in any case.'<sup>45</sup>

For Davies the most important possible role for a submarine fleet was the one envisaged by the Rudd Labor government in its 2009 White Paper, and the one urged on Australia publicly by US diplomats—a symbolic political contribution to maintaining alliance credit through a niche role in US naval operations against China:

'If it's uncomfortable to be talking about war with China, it should be. It's a horrendous proposition and one we'd much prefer to avoid for many reasons. But it's something the United States is thinking about.'<sup>46</sup>

In the view of the Australian government, US-led coalition war against China was precisely the context for a niche role being considered for Australian forces and for submarines in particular. As Davies wrote, this 'horrendous proposition' was being spoken of in Washington and Tokyo, and increasingly in Canberra, on occasion with a degree of insouciance that should be condemned and attacked. Besides the obvious fundamental objections to such an Australian role, by the time most of the submarines are built twenty years or more from now, the undersea balance in waters close to China will likely have either reversed from the present US–Japan dominance or become so favourable to Chinese anti-submarine warfare as

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<sup>45</sup> Andrew Davies, *Presentation to the Submarine Institute of Australia*.

<sup>46</sup> Andrew Davies, "The who, what, where, and why of the future submarine", *The Strategist*, 14 March 2015, at <http://www.aspistrategist.org.au/how-to-choose-an-australian-submarine/>

to designate a niche Australian submarine role as somewhere between insignificant and suicidal.<sup>47</sup>

There is now an urgent need for a careful and comprehensive accounting of the nuclear-powered submarine. But there is a long history of distortion of ADF force structure investments with significant strategic and broader political consequences.

In 2007 Desmond Ball published a powerful detailed critique of

‘the incoherence and lack of firm priorities in the strategic guidance and political interference in the [ADF] capital acquisition process have resulted in an increasing number of questionable capability development decisions.’<sup>48</sup>

Citing six examples whose total cost amounting ‘more than \$25 billion in current (2006-07) dollars, and likely to exceed \$35 billion by the time they become operational’ Ball went on to note that

‘Clear and coherent guidance is especially necessary in the Defence portfolio, where the fiscal costs are so large, the scope for play of Service interests and political factors so great, and the consequences of poor planning so potentially calamitous.’<sup>49</sup>

The examples included refurbished Abrams M1A1 main battle tanks (‘The most dubious decision’), C-17 Globemaster III heavy-lift transport aircraft, two large amphibious landing ships (LHDs), Lockheed Martin F-35 Joint Strike Fighters (‘the most expensive program’), three The Air Warfare Destroyers, and the Headquarters Joint Operations Command at Bungendore.

Ball was writing several years before the beginning of the project to replace Australia’s aging *Collins*-class diesel-electric-powered submarines that was to result in the Future Submarine program, initially costed at \$20 bn, rising to \$45 bn at the time of the Turnbull government’s decision to award a contract to the French state-owned Naval Group construct eight Attack-class submarines based on a conventional version of the French nuclear-powered *Barracuda*-

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<sup>47</sup> Owen R. Cote Jr., “Assessing the undersea balance between the U.S. and China”, *MIT Security Studies Program, SSP Working Papers*, February, 2011, at [http://web.mit.edu/ssp/publications/working\\_papers/Undersea%20Balance%20WP11-1.pdf](http://web.mit.edu/ssp/publications/working_papers/Undersea%20Balance%20WP11-1.pdf).

<sup>48</sup> Desmond Ball, ‘Rushing Headlong to Infirmity: Australian Defence Policy and Force Structure Development’, *Security Challenges*, Volume 3 Number 4 (November 2007), pp. 11-27

<sup>49</sup> Ball, ‘Rushing Headlong to Infirmity’, p. 17 and p. 26.



class attack submarine. By the time of the cancellation of the French contract in September 2021 its cost had reportedly risen to \$95 bn – and according to some sources a secret government estimate indicated that figure had been determined some years earlier, and that consequently the ‘actual’ cost in 2021 was probably higher still.

The Morrison government has already conceded that the eight replacements of the 12 planned French boats, whenever they are built, whatever they are (wholly unknown apart from a specification of being nuclear-powered) whoever builds them (??), and wherever they are built (???), will cost more than \$100 bn. In fact, leaving aside all the almost structurally determined cost escalation factors built into complex and novel defence megaprojects<sup>50</sup>, the For Ever boats are likely to be twice the size (displacement) of the French contract’s *Shortfin Barracuda*-class (based on 9,000 tonne US *Virginia*-class SSNs and 8,000 tonne UK *Astute*-class SSNs). In addition, to this must be added the presently incalculable cost of not just maintaining the technically complex nuclear-power plants, but also creating the politically sensitive knowledge-base and infrastructure that will make that possible – to the extent that it happens in Australia.

All this just points to one aspect of Ball’s 2007 critique: what appeared then to be huge investments with very serious inadequacies are now dwarfed by the successor ‘single largest defence investment in Australia’ – upwards of four times the cost (at current estimates) for this one project alone of all six projects Ball pointed to.

Ball’s real point, echoed ringingly by the domestic and international disquiet at the point of the defeat in Afghanistan and the accompanying war crimes investigations, and the nuclear submarines disaster, was a much broader, and unfortunately enduring political concern for accountability in Australian defence matters:

‘However, there is a palpable risk of growing public disenchantment with Defence. Management is seen as incompetent and profligate, unable to prevent massive

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<sup>50</sup> See the discussion of these characteristics of megaprojects in Richard Tanter, Submission to the Defence Subcommittee, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Inquiry into the Benefits and Risks of a Bipartisan Australian Defence Agreement, as a Basis of Planning For, and Funding of, Australian Defence Capability, 2 November 2017; also available as ‘Bad, Bad BADA (aka Bipartisan Australian Defence Agreement)’, *Pearls & Irritations*, 1 March 2018, <https://johnmenadue.com/richard-tanter-bad-bad-bada-aka-bipartisan-australian-defence-agreement/>.

budget blow-outs; the intelligence community has lost much credibility; 'security' and 'defence' have become political issues, with the ADF serving as a political instrument, whether in stopping 'boat people' or in supporting the United States in Iraq; and the imminent failure in Iraq and the inability of the ADF to bring peace and stability wherever it goes (including in our own neighbourhood) will dampen public enthusiasm for expeditionary activities. It would be a great shame for the ADF to lose its high public regard; it would be disastrous if public disdain for Defence manifests at the very point where a national consensus will be needed to rectify the critical capability deficiencies currently being generated.<sup>51</sup>

That describes the present situation almost exactly.

## 8. Unacknowledged or undetected foreign influence on force posture structure

In that 2007 account Ball hinted at, but did not emphasize, the fact that most of his examples pointed to a privileging of requirements for operational capacity best suited to distant operations in an international coalition. The shadow of the alliance was evident in decisions about the Abrams tanks, the F-35 fighters, the Air Warfare Destroyers, and the amphibious landing docks.<sup>52</sup>

One rhetorical vehicle for the heightening integration of allied forces into US-led global strategic intervention capacity has been the mantra of 'interoperability', a US-coined term originally used in military circles generally to refer to technological compatibility between, say, communications equipment or weapons systems software used by two militaries likely to be operating in concert at some time. What is usually represented as an essentially technical matter dissociated from politics, or even from a strategic argument, turns out, courtesy of documents released by WikiLeaks about another country's decision to buy the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, to be a vehicle for transnational reproduction of Australia's place in empire.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ball, 'Rushing Headlong to Infirmary', p. 27.

<sup>52</sup> The following paragraphs are drawn from Richard Tanter, 'WikiLeaks, Australia and empire', in Felicity Ruby and Peter Cronau, (eds.), *A Secret Australia: Revealed by the WikiLeaks Exposés*, Monash University Press, 2020.

<sup>53</sup> Srdjan Vucetic and Rebecka S. Rydberg, 'Remnants of Empire: Tracing Norway's F-35 Decision', *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2015, pp. 56–78.

For more than half a century Australia and other countries in the US global alliance system have participated to a greater or lesser extent in a congeries of US-driven multilateral committees and military agencies such as the American, British, Canadian, Australian Armies' Program (ABCA), the Multinational Interoperability Council (MIC), the Technical Cooperation Program (TTCP), the AUSCANNZUKUS Naval C4 Organization, the Air and Space Interoperability Council (ASIC), and the Combined-Communications Electronics Board (CCEB).<sup>54</sup> For much of the long life of these alliance management bodies, for European allies of the US and generally for Australia, interoperability in practice minimally meant compatibility and complementarity.

However, in Australia the interoperability mantra has come to function as a kind of intellectual solvent which results in the dissolving or dismissal of otherwise salient distinctions about the nature of alliance. From the mid-1990s onward, interoperability became the watchword for the shared views of the Howard and Rudd–Gillard--Rudd governments of a need for Australia to cleave ever closer to the United States in terms of military matériel, operational procedures, and doctrine.

The most developed Australian argument for a move towards 'a politico-strategic conceptualization of interoperability' was proposed by Adam Lockyer in a discussion about the 2002 decision by the Howard government to participate in the US-led industrial consortium to produce the Lockheed Martin F-35 Joint Strike Fighter – the centre of 'the arms deal of the century'. This commitment to the aircraft's development eventually resulted in a 2009 Rudd Labor government decision to purchase 72 of the F-35A version of the Lockheed Martin aircraft. As of April 2019, four F-35A aircraft were being operated by the RAAF's No. 3 Squadron at RAAF Base Williamtown, with initial operating capability expected by December 2020.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas-Durrell Young, 'Cooperative Diffusion through Cultural Similarity: The Postwar Anglo-Saxon Experience', in Emily O. Goldman and Leslie C. Eliason, *The Diffusion of Military Technology and Ideas*, Stanford University Press, 2003; and Richard Tanter, 'Interoperability', *Australian Forces Abroad Briefing Book*, Nautilus Institute, 2008, <https://nautilus.org/publications/books/australian-forces-abroad/security-general/interoperability/>.

<sup>55</sup> *F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) Fast Facts: Australian F-35A Project – AIR6000 Phase 2A/B*, Defence Department, Capability Acquisition and Sustainment Group, April 2019, [www.defence.gov.au/casg/Multimedia/F\\_35\\_Fast\\_Facts\\_April\\_2019-9-9296.pdf](http://www.defence.gov.au/casg/Multimedia/F_35_Fast_Facts_April_2019-9-9296.pdf).

As in most of the 13 US allied countries which have now signed agreements to acquire F-35s, the Australian decision was the subject of much debate. Lockyer's contribution to a 2013 global academic forum on 'The International Politics of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter' attributed the Australian F-35 acquisition decision to enduring Australian foreign and defence policy concerns 'to hedge between dependence and self-reliance' on the one hand, and on the other to the implications of the industrial logic of military aircraft capability development – and the resultant almost exponential increases in cost to government.<sup>56</sup> Nations are, Lockyer asserted, 'entering an era when they will not be able to respond to the full-spectrum of contingencies because the ability to afford a defence force that is capable of responding to the full spectrum is coming to an end'.<sup>57</sup>

As Australia's regional neighbours strengthen their economies and hence military purchasing capacities, Australia will not be able to afford large numbers of the kinds of highly expensive US-built advanced aircraft that have given Australia, courtesy of the US alliance, a history of technological edge over neighbours. Hence, Lockyer argued, Australia will have to make hard choices, and eventually settle for smaller numbers of such aircraft, with a resulting diminution of strategic superiority: 'Partnerships will become increasingly important'.

While it might be thought that Australian defence planners such as Paul Dibb (especially in his 1992 argument on the strategic and conceptual foundations of Australian defence policy and force structure) have been wrestling with similar problems for some decades, Lockyer's conclusion is that Australia should move from 'an operational to a politico-strategic conceptualization of interoperability', a new and deeper conception of alliance for the 21st century.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Paul Lockyer, 'The Logic of Interoperability: Australia's acquisition of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter', *International Journal*, Vol. 68, No. 1, (Winter 2012-13), pp. 71-91.

<sup>57</sup> Lockyer, 'Logic of Interoperability', p. 86.

<sup>58</sup> Paul Dibb, *The Conceptual Basis of Australia's Defence Planning and Force Structure Development*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No. 88, 1992, <http://sdsc.bellschool.anu.edu.au/experts-publications/publications/3155/conceptual-basis-australias-defence-planning-and-force>; and Lockyer, 'Logic of Interoperability', p. 89.

Working from a strategic presumption that since Australia has critical defence requirements both at the local/regional level, and at a distance, effectively at a global level, the solution is for the US and Australia to ‘increase their faith in each other’s support in times of crisis’, and ‘explicitly state that they will take responsibility for different types of contingencies. This might take a redrafting of the ANZUS treaty to clarify what each nation can expect from the other in various situations.’ The upshot would be an explicit division of labour whereby Australia would globally focus on ‘low-end contingencies’, consequently buying fewer F-35s and similar expensive assets, while the US assisted Australia in this by deploying its own F-35s to Australia, but principally continuing ‘to prepare for high-level conflicts with regional powers’.<sup>59</sup>

One of the editors of the special issue of the journal that published Lockyer’s ‘Logic of Interoperability’ essay on the Australian F-35 decision was Srdjan Vucetic, a Canadian political scientist well-known in Australia for his subtle theoretical and historical work on the concept of the Anglosphere as racialized identity.<sup>60</sup> Two years after the special issue on ‘The International Politics of the F-35’, which had included an article on the Norwegian decision to purchase 40 of the F-35A aircraft, Vucetic and a Norwegian colleague, Rebecka Rydberg, returned to the Norwegian decision.<sup>61</sup>

The centrepiece of Vucetic and Rydberg’s re-analysis of the Norwegian process was a set of six cables sent to the State Department by the US embassies in Oslo and Stockholm between July and December 2008. The WikiLeaks publication of these cables in 2010 ‘greatly complicate’ the otherwise accepted ‘official’ story that the F-35 won out over its Swedish competitor, the Saab JAS-39NG Gripen, following what was presented as an open and fair technical assessment competition. To the contrary, Vucetic and Rydberg relied on the WikiLeaks cables and interviews with government and industry officials to argue that the decision had been substantially influenced both by covert United States government

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<sup>59</sup> Lockyer, ‘Logic of Interoperability’, p. 91.

<sup>60</sup> Srdjan Vucetic, *The Anglosphere: A Genealogy of a Racialized Identity in International Relations*, Stanford University Press, 2011.

<sup>61</sup> Jens Ringsmose, ‘Investing in Fighters and Alliances: Norway, Denmark, and the Bumpy Road to the Joint Strike Fighter’, *International Journal*, vol. 68, no. 1, The International Politics of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (Winter 2012–13), pp. 93–110; and Srdjan Vucetic and Rebecka S. Rydberg, ‘Remnants of Empire: Tracing Norway’s F-35 Decision’, *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2015, pp. 56–78.

interference in the procurement process, and by an unspoken and otherwise hidden bias of a significant group of high-level government officials.<sup>62</sup>

Vucetic and Rydberg are cautious in their claims, well aware that ‘the most important decision-making moments in this policy domain are rarely committed to paper or otherwise reliably recorded’, and that their analysis should only be taken as ‘a rough, first-cut reconstruction of Norway’s F-35 decision’. To be clear about their claims, it is worth quoting their summary at length, with its stress on the role of various interlocutors and advocates seeking to acquire public support to legitimize the decision:

First, the Americans – meaning a loosely institutionalized network of officials from the Departments of State and Defense, the Joint Program Office, which oversees the making of the stealthy fighter jet, plus Lockheed Martin representatives and supporters – substantially interfered with the Norwegian policy process via multiple channels, both private and public.

Second, key Norwegian brokers – a group of influential politicians and bureaucrats – not only understood and to different degrees endorsed the positions and preferences held by the ‘imperial’ centre, but they sometimes also advanced them on their own initiative.

Third, the two sides consulted and coordinated on how to most effectively legitimate the F-35 in front of different Norwegian audiences, thus diffusing domestic political opposition to the deal and the Norway–American alliance in general.<sup>63</sup>

Interoperability was a key feature of the many public discussions about the choice between the F-35 and the Gripen. One clear concern in media discussions, familiar in comparable Australian decisions, was not about the technical capabilities of the aircraft as such, but simply whether to join in cooperation with the Swedes or the Americans. When the criteria of

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<sup>62</sup> Richard Tanter, Submission to the Defence Sub-Committee, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Inquiry into the Benefits and Risks of a Bipartisan Australian Defence Agreement, as a Basis of Planning For, and Funding of, Australian Defence Capability, 2 November 2017; and ‘Bad, Bad BADA (aka Bipartisan Australian Defence Agreement)’, *Pearls & Irritations*, 1 March 2018, <https://johnmenadue.com/richard-tanter-bad-bad-bada-aka-bipartisan-australian-defence-agreement/>.

<sup>63</sup> Vucetic and Rydberg, ‘Remnants of Empire’, p. 57.

interoperability included a requirement for Norway's operational capability centred on 'out of area missions' under NATO, interoperability:

'almost always denoted commonality or identity, implying the need of the RNoAF to operate the same fighter jet as the USAF. In effect, the term worked as code for the F-35. To a lesser extent, the same can be said about the argument that the RNoAF required the 'best available' gear in order to deter the latent Russian threat or the one about the need of the Norwegian defence industry to plug into the supply chain for the 'most advanced' military systems.'<sup>64</sup>

Vucetic and Rydberg emphasize the role of public discussion as a path to national decisions that will be seen as legitimate in mass democracies, but which are in fact inserted into an international system of hierarchy they characterize as 'empire by invitation'. In these circumstances, they argue, 'mass politics, publicity, and democracy all compel the metropolitan and local brokers to give substantial weight to their political communication strategies'.

Vucetic and Rydberg conclude that the WikiLeaks cables provide

'evidence that "empire" in Norway–American defence relations operates as a pattern of indirect rule that links superordinate and subordinate polities through locally brokered asymmetric contracts and in terms of specific modes of public legitimation.'<sup>65</sup>

The evidence from the revised account of the Norwegian decision points to Australian parallels which are evident and highly salient, given the clear evidence of covert American intervention in the decision-making of another US ally that, like Australia, also hosts significant US military and intelligence facilities.

What is most striking from an Australian perspective is that, to the best of my knowledge, no Australian researcher or policy analyst has published on the question of the salience of these

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<sup>64</sup> Vucetic and Rydberg, 'Remnants of Empire', p. 71.

<sup>65</sup> Vucetic and Rydberg, 'Remnants of Empire', p. 60.

revised findings about the Norwegian F-35 decision for what had been until recently, Australia's largest ever weapons purchase.

This issue is worth linking to the findings of one of the most striking studies of the Australian elite networks enabling – and constituting – the American alliance: Scappatura's interview-based study of *The US Lobby and Australian Defence Policy*.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Vince Scappatura, *The US Lobby and Australian Defence Policy*, (Clayton, VIC.: Monash U.P. 2019).



### Part III. The alternative: disentangling from the alliance towards a defensible Australia

A foreign policy of independence to optimize real independence and freedom of action must be based on active participation in the matters that affect national interests, based on a commitment to cooperative security, and the priority of solidarity in the human interest.

Any shift from alliance dependence will be deeply contested, and movement will be partial, intermittent, and always incomplete.

Rather than proposing any pretence to a whole framework, in a short space I will talk in terms of directions and pathways, to be elaborated later – not simply because time is limited, but also because each of the dimensions I examine below is both genuinely complex, with much more to be attended to than I suggest here, and because there are matters of genuine uncertainty.

If a goal can be thought of in general terms as one of non-alignment in a multi-polar world, one set of starting points will involve what Malcolm Fraser called *disentangling from the alliance*. By that Fraser meant not some tumultuous rupture, but a gradual unpicking of different individual elements of entanglement, through a process of learning of possibilities and intractables.

A second set of starting points involves consideration of what kind of framework of objectives and processes are involved for the other two of Australia's three constitutive or primary relationships: after the United States, with Indonesia as the defining geographic neighbour, and with China as the longterm likely dominant factor in the East and Southeast Asian sphere of influence after the United States.

A third set of starting points concerns alternative defence policy proper, and in particular the place of armed neutrality as one specification of a more general policy of military non-alignment and optimizing self-reliance.

A fourth approach, which touches on the others, but must be considered a fundamental, is a defence of Australia that does not involve nuclear weapons.

## 1. Disentangling from the alliance

The fundamental issue that Fraser was alluding to was the great reluctance of Australians to even attempt to break out from the alliance, even in small ways. One consequence of this the distinctive contemporary problems about Australian foreign policy. This was epitomized by the backward-looking folly of the Morrison's government announcement of the For Ever Partnership. What has become clear is that at the centre of Australian government, especially on matters of defence, there is a profound difficulty in conducting an intellectually honest and robust assessment of when Australian and US interests align, and when they do not align. This is a fundamental responsibility of government in Australia.<sup>67</sup> The characteristic form of self-delusion in this matter is to insist, at the level of marketing rhetoric, that exactly this is what is being done.<sup>68</sup>

Disentangling starts by keeping a watch for opportunities to exercise the weakened muscles of questioning the automatic equation of Australian and US interests. Demanding greater transparency and accountability in defence and foreign policy decisions, a proper accounting of the strategic logic involved. The bipartisanship of foreign and defence policy should be a first target of a disentangling approach. The responsible citizen should be asking why, given that our parliamentary system is at least nominally organised around adversarial debate, Liberal and Labor so often agree on one of the most important issues – without any serious

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<sup>67</sup> This sense also emerges from the interviews conducted by Max Suich noted above concerning the development of China policy.

<sup>68</sup> 'Today, I announce a new partnership, a new agreement that I describe as a forever partnership. A forever partnership for a new time between the oldest and most trusted of friends. A forever partnership that will enable Australia to protect our national security interests, to keep Australians safe, and to work with our partners across the region to achieve the stability and security of our region. This forever partnership that we have announced today is the single greatest initiative to achieve these goals since the ANZUS alliance itself. It is the single largest step we have been able to take to advance our defence capabilities in this country, not just at this point, but for the future... My government shares the view that I think is grounded in the decisions of Curtin and Menzies, which is always understood that our relationship with the United States is a forever relationship. It is a relationship that has served our peace and security interests for a very, very long time and will forever into the future.' See the full statement by Prime Minister Morrison, *Transcript, 16 Sep 2021, Canberra, ACT Prime Minister E&OE*, at <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/press-conference-canberra-act-24>.

argument? Why is it that wedging works so well? That in itself brings to the surface to the embedded forms of power that is part of the strength of the alliance after three quarters of a century.

Disentangling is a matter of opportunity and testing the occasional possibility of questioning, building each time a little more in the way of intellectual, organisational and cultural resources to extend the sense of what might be possible through illuminating new potential examples.

## 2. The other constitutive relationships – China and Indonesia

Talking about alternative policy approaches to the American alliance has to be accompanied by serious discussion, debate, and trial and error to work through equally difficult and interlinked problems about the two other relationships which fundamentally structure the realm of possibility for Australia.

This will not be a proper attempt to discuss either of these two complicated problems, but rather point to some key issues. Amongst other factors, common to both relationships is a fundamental problem of deep ignorance about both countries. This may appear to be less serious than it really is. The reports about an Australian government survey of Australians' knowledge of Indonesia revealing that something like a third of Australians thought that Bali and Indonesia were different countries. Given that roughly a million Australians have been visiting Bali for decades, that points to a massive blockage of understanding of even the simplest matters. Deep-grained European origin-derived cultural hostility to Islam is another source of blockage regarding Indonesia. And this is for a country where the language obstacle is markedly lower than for the East Asian neighbours.<sup>69</sup>

To consider the blockage to knowing China, consider a thought exercise. Maybe start with: *Name five US political leaders today. Name five American artists (musicians, actors, directors,*

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<sup>69</sup> For a discussion of the characteristics of the Australia-Indonesia relationships and some paths to changed relations based on recognition of shared interests (rather than shared values) see Richard Tanter, 'Shared problems, shared interests: reframing Australia-Indonesia security relations', in Jemma Purdey (editor), *Knowing Indonesia: Intersections of Self, Discipline and Nation*, (Monash University Press, 2012).

writers, painters, graphic novelists, etc.) whose work is important to you personally. Name five American historical figures you respect or admire. Name five personal relationships you have with the United States through family, work, or interest.

Most Australians won't have too much trouble providing answers on most of the questions. The problem comes when you ask the same questions regarding China: *Name five Chinese political leaders today. Name five Chinese artists (musicians, actors, directors, writers, painters, graphic novelists, etc.) whose work is important to you personally. Name five Chinese historical figures you respect or admire. Name five personal relationships you have with China through family, work, or interest.*

There will be a fair number of Australians who will be able to answer most of the China questions easily, but by comparison with the number knowledgeable about the US, not many.

The point is not just that we are ignorant in particular directions – that's inevitable. But it does mean that firstly there is not much of a basis of personal experience, valuation or affection for China compared with a deep connection to the United States, and that of course magnified by our mass media and lack of linguistic prowess. And secondly, that means that there is no basis of knowledge to provide context for news about the numerous negative aspects we learn about in China. The many negatives of America are largely counter-balanced by the embedded positives. When things go wrong in the news with China – as they often will – there is no ballast formed by direct experience, relationship or affection.

There is obviously a great deal more to address regarding both China and Indonesia of a quite different character, but time does not permit.

### 3. Armed Neutrality for Australia assessed today.

In 1984 David Martin published his book *Armed Neutrality for Australia*. It was, and remains, the most original book written on Australian defence policy and one of the most important. Tellingly, Martin wrote from outside both the defence and academic establishments, and wholly outside government experience. Most importantly, while Martin worked hard to

master the publicly available substantive analyses of Australian defence policy to that point, he wrote his book in plain language for a general reader. *Armed Neutrality for Australia* is not a comprehensive discussion of Australian defence policy as a whole or in great detail, but rather an argument for armed neutrality as the foundational foreign and defence policy for Australia.

Martin opened the book with an ambition for a future Australia, one that, irrespective of whether his argument for neutrality argument is accepted, is even more necessary to aim for today than it was during the fevered alliance atmosphere of what was then being recognized as the Second Cold War:

‘A healthy nation, confident in itself, manages its own affairs in conformity with its long-term interests. It will seek to fashion policies to ensure its survival as a free, prosperous and peaceable community, taking account of its physical location and the quality and quantity of its human and material resources. It will also respect the legitimate aspirations of other nations.’<sup>70</sup>

The details of Martin’s vision of an armed and neutral Australia are spelt out at length and with nuance in the book as a whole, but the essentials were clearly stated:

- Australia should not participate in military alliances in time of peace, with the aim of neutrality in the event of war.
- As a declared neutral Australia should have a strong and self-reliant defence capability and be prepared to exercise it in the defence of its interests.
- Australia should develop a comprehensive defence capability with both military and non-military elements amounting to what was sometimes called total defence.
- Australia should not either acquire nuclear weapons of its own or rely on the nuclear weapons of another country for its security. Australian nuclear weapons of any realistically conceivable size or number would never provide any significant advantage against credibly nuclear-armed adversaries (including China), and if acquired would

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<sup>70</sup> David Martin, *Armed Neutrality for Australia*, (Blackburn, VIC: Dove Communications, 1984), p. 1.

almost certainly induce a self-defeating nuclear arms race with neighbouring countries.

Martin delimited the promise of his argument sensibly and clearly:

‘Armed neutrality is not a prescription to cure all our troubles. It is no rigid formula to guarantee us inviolable; no policy can do that. But to sustain it we have enviable advantages, above all strategic and economic ones.’

And Martin concluded with an invitation to carry his discussion onward in terms that make clear how salient his argument remains today:

‘For this country, armed neutrality is still a new idea, therefore in discussing it one must distinguish the central and lasting from the narrowly topical. It will not come today or tomorrow, but it offers Australia a concrete and positive alternative to its present course.’<sup>71</sup>

Martin discussed five European neutrals in the 1980s, judging, despite their evident diversity, each on balance successful: Switzerland, Sweden, Austria, Finland, and Ireland. He concluded that their history (and that of the unsuccessful European twentieth century neutrals: Belgium and the Netherlands) provided three lessons for Australia about the conditions under which neutrality may be successful:

- ‘The country must be strategically defensible.’
- ‘It must be willing, and to some extent have the capacity, to meet threats from any side. For this it must prepare in peacetime.’
- ‘It must depend not on foreign guarantees but on its own strength, at least fundamentally. For this it must be ready to accept sacrifices.’<sup>72</sup>

An Australia willing to move away from alliance and accept these requirements would have a good chance of successful pursuit of security through armed neutrality. And more importantly, Martin thought Australia could, with will and preparation, meet all three requirements.

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<sup>71</sup> David Martin, *Armed Neutrality for Australia*, p. 2.

<sup>72</sup> Martin, *Armed Neutrality for Australia*, p. 111.

### 3.1 How does Martin's version of armed neutrality for Australia look today? The new elements

Since Martin wrote *Armed Neutrality for Australia* nearly four decades ago the Cold War has become a matter of fading generational memory, succeeded by a more complex multi-polar international order, and a multiply-fractured disorder of global social and economic relations generating new forms of perceived insecurity for Australia. So, does Martin's advocacy of armed neutrality as the foundation of Australian defence policy still stand scrutiny? What has changed in its picture since the early 1980s?

A listing of the most obviously relevant changes is weighted in the negative, suggesting that an armed and neutral Australia would either be a more difficult place to reach or a more difficult position to sustain.

#### 1. The end of the clarity of the Cold War

In the 1980s, the gorgon stare of the two Cold War superpowers still held the international system frozen into two blocs, with the Free World locked into what was presented as an unending existential struggle against International Communism. China may have been recognized by the United States (and Australia), but there was little doubt for Australian governments that the world was organised at its core around a bipolar existentially threatening totalistic confrontation. While each of the neutrals of that time reviewed by Martin had its own specific character and historical pathways, there was little doubt that the neutrality of each was coloured by the Cold War confrontation.

Neutrality in wartime has always been in practice complicated, difficult and less than morally straightforward. But today even the growing dangerous hostility between the U.S. and China does not amount to the total opposition on all matters, tantamount to a challenge to existence of the other, that characterised the Cold War. Today that global confrontational clarity has receded. What neutrality amounts to is less predictable, and each of Martin's five European neutrals has shifted ground.

## 2. The decline of the Non-Aligned Movement

Equally, the 'third way' of the Cold War, epitomised by the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which complemented thinking about formal neutrality, has become diminished in strength and clarity. In thinking about Australia's recent ADF deployments of note, both Indonesia and East Timor are NAM members, as are both Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, partners in the Australian-supported war in Yemen. 'Non-alignment' in the positive, global sense that traces back to the Afro-Asia Conference in Bandung in 1955 is at the very least less potent and more morally and politically compromised.

Some leading members of the NAM have retained non-alignment as the basis of their foreign policy. In this region, the most notable example is Indonesia, which still retains fundamental commitment to two principles developed in the time of the Indonesian national revolution: a foreign policy that is 'free and active' (*bebas dan aktif*) and an orientation characterised by the need to row between two reefs (*mendayung antara dua karang*). This informs Indonesia's attitude to China and tempers its response to Chinese aggressive EEZ claims near Indonesia's island of Natuna in the South China Sea.

It is an understatement to say that Australia has always been dismissive of Australian exploration of the possibilities of non-alignment or neutrality would find an attentive audience in Indonesia, in contrast to the volatility of the relationship over the past half century and the Indonesian government's deep concern of the Australian deepening integration into US war planning towards China.

## 3. Shifts amongst the neutrals

Each of the European neutrals Martin discussed in *Armed Neutrality for Australia* has somewhat modified its interpretation of neutrality today. Largely, but not solely, this attenuation of an earlier form of neutrality is the result of closer association with or entry into the European Union, and the subsequent adoption of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. For the Nordic neutrals, as always, the direction of Russian foreign policy generally and Baltic regional policy in particular are primary concerns.



Sweden and Switzerland were especially important for Martin's armed neutrality argument as it applied to Australia. In Sweden's case, the development of 'post-neutrality' entry into the EU in 1995 was paralleled by an ever-closer move towards NATO, epitomised by participation in the NATO-led ISAF deployment to Afghanistan. While a parliamentary vote on NATO membership is anticipated in the near future, the formal Swedish position is one of 'military non-alignment'.<sup>73</sup> Finland similarly is now an EU member that is also a full participant in NATO's Partnership for Peace, although support for neutrality remains strong enough that Finland is not likely to seek membership of NATO in the near future.

Switzerland also is influenced by its inevitable ties to neighbours that are full members of European Union, as well as by changes in possible sources of threat. Switzerland has not abandoned its policy of armed neutrality, but has moved to a position where neutrality as an instrument is complemented by a greater focus on active solidarity and cooperation in order to credibly ensure 'a sufficient degree of real independence'. However, a Swiss government White paper argued that 'neutrality as an instrument has lost some of its efficiency and impact' in the light of high levels of 'active, comprehensive solidarity, and both global and regional cooperation and participation'. Switzerland remains committed to non-belligerency and to maintaining a strong military capability 'structurally only equipped to defend the country'. But the escalating cost of military technology, WMD threats and missile technology and missile defence developments have induced greater interest in multilateral defence cooperation, and hence, a greater degree of qualification on neutrality.

'The purpose of neutrality is to enhance the country's security, not to restrict its defence capability. It should not prevent a neutral country from taking the necessary steps to defend itself against new threats and from plugging any gaps in its defence arrangements through countermeasures which extend beyond its national borders.'<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ulf Bjereld and Ulrika Möller, 'Swedish Foreign Policy: The Policy of Neutrality and Beyond The Oxford Handbook of Swedish Politics', in Jon Pierre (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Swedish Politics*, (Oxford Handbooks Online, 2016, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199665679.013.25; Charlie Duxbury, 'Sweden edges closer to NATO membership', *Politico*, 22 December 2020, at <https://www.politico.eu/article/sweden-nato-membership-dilemma/>.

<sup>74</sup> *White Paper on Neutrality: Annex to the Report on Swiss Foreign Policy for the Nineties of 29 November 1993*, Swiss Federal Council, 93.098), p. 14.

This is only a sketch of post-1989 changes in the case of two of Martin's examples, which point to the need for a closer examination of the current situation with all Martin's European examples, and any others he did not consider.

#### 4. Missing in action: like-minded countries?

At the very least, the assumption that there could well be sustained cooperation and coordination between an armed and neutral Australia and 'like-minded neutrals' has to be tested further today. This is especially clear in relation to the question of defence technology production, as will be discussed below. But it also applies more general to the diplomatic forms of 'solidarity and cooperation' to which the Swiss White Paper adverts. The kind of cooperation between progressive states (including neutrals and non-aligned states) and international civil society that led to the adoption at the UN and then entry into of force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. This example points to the possible non-military underpinnings of non-aligned foreign policy.

#### 5. The compromising of United Nations mandates for armed intervention

One dimension of any non-aligned security policy is the role the ADF should play in collective defence auspiced by the United Nations. The UNSC has never been innocent of great power influence – most obviously historically by its legitimization of UD-led United Nations forces in the Korean War – a matter which remains on the agenda for Australia today.

In the month when Australia, following the United States, withdraws from its longest foreign war, it must be remembered that the war in Afghanistan, from October 2001 to 2021, was a war authorized by the United Nations Security Council, and then extended by annual resolutions of the Council. All such resolutions were supported by Australia, Both the military and civilian/political operations conducted against the Taliban and other 'Anti-Government Forces' in Afghanistan principally through ISAF and its successor organisation were legitimated and carried out under United Nations auspices.

This points to a degree of effective institutional capture of the UNSC by the United States, at least for a time at a particular historical conjuncture – which was never effectively challenged either in the UN or in Australian politics. The consequence for a defence policy of non-alignment or armed neutrality is that reliance on UNSC resolutions for guidance on participation in collective defence activities under the heading of ‘UN peace keeping’ is not necessarily appropriate.

Furthermore, it points to the need for any alternative foreign and defence policy to take seriously the need for deep institutional renewal of global institutions of collective security. A non-aligned Australia would need to be looking to be in the forefront of non-alliance attempts to contribute to reform of compromised global institutions, and to explore new forms of solidarity and cooperation for peace.

### 3.2 A preliminary conclusion of *Armed Neutrality for Australia* today

Time does not permit a complete review of these questions. The factors discussed point to complications and some novel dimensions against which test Martin’s argument. As I write days after the announcement of the cancellation of the French submarine contract and the announcement of AUKUS – whatever that reversion to Australian thinking more characteristic of the time of Federation than what is needed today, the fundamental drivers of thinking about a foreign policy of active non-alignment and armed neutrality – whatever the finer points – are as powerful as they were when David Martin first set them out.

## 4. Nuclear-free defence policy

The minimal requirements of a non-nuclear defence of Australia include

- permanently abjuring the hosting, acquisition or development of indigenous nuclear weapons;
- abandoning reliance on extended nuclear deterrence;
- setting limits on the purposes for which foreign (or nominally ‘joint’) military and intelligence facilities hosted by Australia may be used, including a prohibition on their contribution to the conduct of nuclear war; and

- should it prove impossible to establish such limits, these facilities should be closed.

#### 4.1 Pathways for Australia to accede to the nuclear ban treaty

Obviously much now depends on whether a future Australian government will be more willing than the present government to sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). We should hope that the ALP will honour the commitment made in the party's platform to do so, but first an election win is required, and then the new government must act as promised.

There are two sets of obstacles in the treaty that an Australian government seeking to join the TPNW – one is the policy of reliance on extended nuclear deterrence, and the other role of Pine Gap in assistance to US nuclear deterrence and war-fighting activities.<sup>75</sup>

Reliance by Australia extended nuclear deterrence would violate the TPNW prohibition on encouragement or inducement to use or threat of use of nuclear weapons in Article 1(e) of the treaty:

‘Assist, encourage or induce, in any way, anyone to engage in any activity prohibited to a State Party under this Treaty’.

A Nuclear Supporting State government like Australia seeking to accede to the TPNW would need to abandon the policy of reliance in US extended nuclear deterrence and provide convincing evidence to a TPNW Meeting of the Parties of repudiation of any non-public agreements or policy arrangements with the United States to the same effect.

Clearly, repudiation of extended nuclear deterrence would involve a great change in Australia's strategic outlook, which would be very difficult to imagine politically, and if that

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<sup>75</sup> These issues are discussed in Richard Tanter, ‘Imagining the Possible: Asia-Pacific Prospects for the Nuclear Ban Treaty’, *GlobalAsia*, Vol.16 No.2, (June 2021), at [https://www.globalasia.org/v16no2/cover/imagining-the-possible-asia-pacific-prospects-for-the-nuclear-ban-treaty\\_richard-tanter](https://www.globalasia.org/v16no2/cover/imagining-the-possible-asia-pacific-prospects-for-the-nuclear-ban-treaty_richard-tanter); and in detail in Tanter, ‘Hope Becomes Law: The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in the Asia-Pacific Region’, *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*, Vol. 4, (2021), Supplement 1, at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/25751654.2021.1908736?needAccess=true>.

were to occur, would involve considerable changes in defence and foreign policy. Yet conceptually, it is a comparatively straightforward matter.

A decade ago George Perkovich suggested three questions to be asked of any country reliant on a policy extended nuclear deterrence.

- What are the actual threats against which extended nuclear deterrence is invoked?
- What are the probabilities attached to such threats?
- Where threats are deemed to be actionable with a nuclear response, what alternative responses or means of addressing the issue exist or could be generated?

No Australian government has ever addressed those questions in public, quite possibly because there are no good answers to them.

An Australian government seeking accede to the nuclear ban treaty faces another, more difficult obstacle. The prohibition in Article 1(e) of the treaty of 'assistance' to any of the prohibited nuclear weapons activities (including use, threat of use of nuclear weapons), applies to the hosting of elements of command, control, and communications (NC3) systems.

Today, these US NC3I elements are juridically 'joint' Australian-US facilities operated, according to the Australian government, with the full knowledge and concurrence of the Australian government.

In May 2018 a senior Australian official testified to a parliamentary committee that joining the TPNW would be against Australia's national interests, principally because of likely damage to its alliance with the United States. This potential for damage, he argued, was in large part precisely because of the nuclear-related elements of 'joint' Australia-US intelligence and military facilities in Australia. The Australian government's view is that the alliance is made up of

'many separate interlocking structures, understandings, agreements and joint activities and facilities ... [that are] incompatible with the treaty',

It is, the official averred,

‘impossible, not practical, for Australia to restrict roles under the alliance to non-nuclear missions.’<sup>76</sup>

Little further elaboration was provided on that or subsequent occasions.<sup>77</sup>

In fact, such matters have rarely been explained officially to the Australian public over the half century or more during which the most important of these facilities have been in existence. On the face of it, the official explanation was an extraordinary admission of an apparently willingly accepted integration of Australia into preparations for nuclear war and nuclear warfighting, long hidden from the Australian public.<sup>78</sup>

While this situation of claimed contradiction between Australia’s alliance obligations and the requirements of possible future compliance with the TPNW may appear to be of parochial Australian concern, the implications for the countries surrounding Australia are no less significant and are rarely discussed in regional dialogues. *Prima facie*, Australia could not be compliant with the treaty unless it either closed the facilities with NC3I linkages *in toto* or verifiably removed the nuclear-related elements of the bases. For the present Australian government and all of its recent predecessors, these requirements are impossible short of abandoning the alliance with the United States.

However, the actual situation of the most important example identified both by the government and by its critics, the Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap near Alice Springs in Central Australia, demonstrates that the government’s blanket rejection of the TPNW because ‘it’s impossible, not practical’ to comply with Article 1(e) should be put under scrutiny.

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<sup>76</sup> Mr. Richard Sadleir, First Assistant Secretary, International Security Division, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Dr John Kalish, Acting Director General, Australian Safeguards and Non-Proliferation Office. Extract from testimony to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee, Parliament of Australia, Estimates Hearing, (31 May 2018), pp. 121-125.

<sup>77</sup> In December 2018, a senior representative of Sadleir’s department explicitly confirmed to the author in a personal communication that Sadleir’s statement represented government policy, concluding that ‘The Government believes that it would not be possible for Australia to unpick and restrict cooperation with the United States to non-nuclear missions alone.’ Jeff Robinson, Assistant Secretary, Arms Control and Counter-Proliferation Branch, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, to Richard Tanter, 18 December 2018.

<sup>78</sup> The most prominent Australian analyst of these Australian nuclear-related facilities, Desmond Ball, frequently described the way in which ‘American installations in Australia have always been the subjects of continued lack of candour on the part of the United States and of extraordinary secrecy, evasion and deception on the part of Australian governments.’ Desmond Ball, *Pine Gap*, (Allen & Unwin, 1980, p. 10). This was a view Ball maintained until his death in 2016.

To comply with the TPNW's prohibition on assistance to nuclear weapons activities, an Australian government would have to undertake one of three possible approaches to the Relay Ground Station at Pine Gap. All three would be examples of what former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser proposed as a judicious partial disentangling of Australia from elements of the US alliance as an alternative to unquestioning acceptance of a specious automatic identity of Australian and US strategic interests. Pragmatically, the politically critical question for Australia in each case, after seven decades of alliance deeply embedded into Australian political culture, is how treaty compliance could be achieved without leading the US to terminate the ANZUS mutual security treaty.

A 'maximalist' approach would be to give notice to the United States requiring the closure of the entire base – i.e., both the two signals intelligence surveillance systems as well as the Relay Ground Station. Simply requiring the closure of the base as a whole would have the virtue of comprehensiveness, but would also be politically very difficult to imagine, even in a brief counterfactual thought experiment of this kind. Leaving aside arguments about the utility to Australia of access to the space-based and ground-based signals intelligence systems at the base that would be lost, the US response would undoubtedly be drastic, and would threaten the continuation of the alliance itself – which in Australian political culture would be deemed suicidal for mainstream political parties.

In a second, 'reformist' approach, the Australian government would have to request, and the United States to accept, verifiable binding legal, organisational and technical limits on specific categories of the operations of the Relay Ground Station. This second approach would involve distinguishing 'defensive' functions of the OPIR system – primarily early warning of missile attack – from unarguably nuclear war-fighting Relay Ground Station links – primarily support for US retaliatory nuclear missile strikes.<sup>79</sup> For technical reasons to do with the automatic character of the Relay Ground Station and remote control of its operations from the United States (rather than from Pine Gap itself), the level of required verification of

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<sup>79</sup> For clarity for the present, let us leave aside arguments as to whether RGS support for US and Japanese missile defence systems should be regarded as 'defensive' and not inherently a matter of prohibited nuclear assistance under the TPNW.

operational separation by an Australian government would, be almost impossible to achieve, to say nothing of the political obstacles.<sup>80</sup>

However, there is a third alternative, a more promising 'reformist' approach to bringing the Relay Ground Station into compliance with the requirements of the ban treaty. This third approach is based on existing redundant communications links the United States has built into its global OPIR system of satellites and ground stations to guard against destruction of NC3 ground facilities like Pine Gap in war. The existence of communications redundancy indicates a strategically viable and politically not wholly impossible pathway to compliance with the TPNW without necessarily disrupting its alliance with the United States.

The Relay Ground Station at Pine Gap – which, like almost all such facilities, is highly vulnerable to attack - provides redundant backup to both the cross-links and the mobile stations systems but is not in itself essential to the OPIR system's survival. All of Pine Gap's early warning satellites have [satellite-satellite crosslinks and communications links](#) to US relay satellites. These enable the crucial early warning data to be transmitted from one to another and then downlinked to the Mission Control Station on US soil without ever relying on the Relay Ground Station. In addition, US OPIR satellites themselves can and do downlink directly to dispersed mobile ground terminals in the United States, as well as to US combat commands around the world, such as South Korea.<sup>81</sup>

Under this third proposal an Australian government could give reasonable notice to the United States requiring the closure of the Relay Ground Station and the removal of its systems from Pine Gap. The remaining larger part of the base and its principal signals intelligence functions would be left unaffected. In this situation, if the Australian government gave the United States appropriate notice – say five years – the Relay Ground Station could be closed without significant detriment to the performance of the OPIR systems or to

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<sup>80</sup> These technical obstacles were recognised by Australian defence officials at the time of Cabinet approval of the establishment of the Relay Ground Station in 1997, but they advised that these obstacles were not insuperable. This conclusion does appear not to have been discussed by the relevant ministers in the National Security Committee meeting. See Tanter, 'Hiding from the Light', and Tanter, 'An Australian pathway'.

<sup>81</sup> David Schaefer, 'Intelligence cooperation and new trends in space technology: do the ties still bind?', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.72 (2018), No. 4, pp. 364-370; and Tanter, 'An Australian pathway'.



genuine US national security interests – although there would obviously be considerable political turbulence.

In this way, a close examination of the Relay Ground Station’s technical aspects and military roles suggests that while all three pathways would be politically fraught, the third pathway shows that the Australian government’s blanket claim that it would be ‘impossible, not practical for Australia to restrict roles under the alliance to non-nuclear missions’ can be refuted in the most egregious example of Australian assistance to prohibited nuclear activities.

Of course, this proposal to close only the Relay Ground Station leaves questions about nuclear-related aspects of other parts of Pine Gap’s operations to be scrutinised, but by demonstrating a plausibly viable pathway in the most important case indicates a broader line of political and policy strategy against unexamined claims of ‘impossibility’.

#### 4.2 The case against Australian nuclear weapons for an independent Australia

One of the most dangerous elements of some proposals for an Australian defence policy more independent of the United States alliance is the suggestion that Australian possession of its own nuclear weapons will increase its security, or even guarantee a form of absolute security. The latter involves pursuit of an illusion, but the former has been put forward by respected defence analysts, including former Deputy Secretary of Defence, Hugh White in his recent book, *How to Defend Australia*.<sup>82</sup> For White, the basic question is

‘Is it possible in this post-post-Cold War to avoid subjugation and preserve the independence of a middle power in a system dominated by nuclear-armed great powers without a nuclear deterrent of one’s own?’

White’s answer, concerning China, is that ‘the only way to avoid this appears to be to counter China’s nuclear threats with a nuclear threat of our own.’ This requirement, White argued,

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<sup>82</sup> Hugh White, *How To Defend Australia*, (Latrobe UP & Black Inc, 2019), pp. 231-250. In 2017-2018 two other well-respected former Deputy Secretary of Defence Paul Dibb and Richard Brabin-Smith also argued that the question of Australian nuclear weapons must be placed on the political agenda, though in arguments less developed and less positively than White.

could be met with a policy of 'minimum deterrence' where nuclear weapons are not used for fighting a war,

'or indeed used at all. Their sole purpose is to deter nuclear attack by others... All they can do is make sure the adversary's nuclear blackmail does not prevent us from using our conventional forces to win a conventional military campaign.'

The long-range capability that would be necessary would be involve 'a couple of hundred nuclear weapons', that could be placed on four submarines, each armed with a number of submarine-launched nuclear missiles, with one submarine constantly at sea. This is roughly the current British and French configuration. This might, White estimated, cost \$5 bn. to \$20 bn. a year on top of conventional forces.<sup>83</sup> There would White conceded, be some strategic costs, though these were not seriously explored.

Although White was at pains to stress, he was not advocating Australia should proceed to acquire nuclear weapons, he wrote that

'My own preliminary conclusion is that there are that there are circumstances in which the development of nuclear forces could be justified, but only where the need was very clear, and where there no alternatives.'

To my mind White's argument amounts to an all but smoking gun advocacy of Australian nuclear weapons. There is very little by way of argument against acquisition. And White's discussion of a potential Chinese situation of nuclear blackmail against Australia suggests that he can foresee a need and that he can see no alternatives at that point.

To be fair to White, not only is treating the Australian public seriously by raising the most difficult defence decision openly and directly, but he minimizes the chances of doing so in convincing fashion by presenting the argument in a short chapter from a book written for a general audience rather than a sustained argument for peers.

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<sup>83</sup> History can be unkind. To be fair to White, he was writing before the cost of the planned French submarines for Australia went up to \$95 bn.

One of the limiting characteristics of White's argument throughout the book, as well as on the nuclear issue is the analytical clockwork he uses repeatedly. For White, the essence of what he calls 'power politics' is that every interaction between competing states is reducible to one question: Over what issue is a country willing to go to war to maintain or improve its position in a hierarchy? This he uses to great effect.

White is not concerned with any other actors besides China, the United States and Australia. That concentration has the virtue of clarity but elides obvious problems. The first is that White's excision of the neighbourhood is unrealistic. Many years ago, Alan Roberts made the fundamental connection that nuclear proliferation is an activity of pairs, more realistically than White's clockwork, when he wrote

'Australia does not have a choice of equipping itself with a plausible deterrent; it merely has the choice of whether any future conflict in its region will be nuclear.'

This is a fundamental objection: if the acquisition of a weapon system is going to cause significantly substantial counter responses, then the sum of security chances is not thereby improved. White chose not to explore the likely implications of Australian nuclear weapons for what was presumably a desired state of 'stable deterrence' – and not a regional cascade of nuclear-armed states. There is no consideration of the tendency for the logic of 'stable deterrence' to generate nuclear technological destabilizing advances as a normal historical pattern. This is particularly salient as the world begins to move into the era of serious climate disruption – which we have not yet begun to experience, even if it known to be unavoidable.

White is a lucid writer, someone to take very seriously, and an affable and friendly person. And yet there are aspects of his discussion of what amounts to an advocacy of nuclear weapons for Australia that are reckless and rooted in various forms of denial, part of which involves a moral tendentiousness.

White's specification of the weapons requirements for 'minimal deterrence' includes a capacity for cities attack, where 'up to 5 million might be killed and a further 4 million injured.' There is no avoiding the fact that this amounts to a conditional advocacy of genocidal

behaviour by Australia – conditional on there being a need and no alternative. White says, ‘there are some moral issues to consider...’, but the consideration does not run deep or become a major consideration.

One response to White’s specifying of conditions for nuclear acquisition of necessity and absence of alternatives has to be tested against other pathways. One such is the alternative possibility that Australia’s security would be better served by commitment to nuclear abolition through the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, and subsequent confidence building measures. There is obviously no guarantee that the TPNW will meet its ultimate goal of contributing to the elimination of nuclear weapons.<sup>84</sup> But White chooses not to explore such ‘alternatives’ to a possible ‘need’ for nuclear weapons.

There is a curious sense of denial, where White seems avert his attention from both moral considerations of asking Australians to commit to genocide as defence. It seems almost to be case of self-censorship.<sup>85</sup> The logic of nuclear deterrence obviously must include both the possibility of failure and the accompanying willingness to detonate the weapon. And equally logically, nuclear optimists like White must assume that deterrence will work as planned not just in our lifetimes, but forever.

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<sup>84</sup> Three proximate goals for the TPNW now it has entered into force for more than fifty states parties that have ratified the treaty are to become binding international law on a sufficiently large number of states so that it may impinge in practice on the behavior of countries that are not states parties; to induce one or more of the Nuclear Supporting States to accede to the treaty; and, more distantly to contribute to shifting at least one of the Nuclear Possessing Countries toward the status of Nuclear Threshold Disarming State. See the discussion in Richard Tanter, ‘Hope becomes Law’, and ‘Imagining the Possible’.

<sup>85</sup> See Benoît Pelopidas, ‘Nuclear Weapons Scholarship as a Case of Self-Censorship in Security Studies’, *Journal of Global Security Studies*, Volume 1, Issue 4, (2016), pp. 326-336.