

Pamela Collett
to: Dr. Vince Scappatura
Military and Defence
IPAN Inquiry

Subject: USA Navy Secretary's Kenneth Braithwaite Proposal to reconstitute the First Fleet in the Indo-Pacific

The USA Navy Secretary's Kenneth Braithwaite proposal to reconstitute the First Fleet in the Indo-Pacific presents a serious threat to peace and stability in the area. In the last days of the current Trump administration, the proposal seems to be a unilateral "trial balloon" aimed at further challenging China.

According to news reports (see attached), there appears to have been no consultation with USA allies in the region, including Singapore, which has been mentioned as a possible base. Braithwaite had evidently not even discussed the proposal with the current (recently appointed) acting USA Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller.

The unilateral approach of the USA, which Braithwaite noted was to maintain its dominance of the Indo-Pacific, is not in the interests of a peaceful Australia. We cannot depend on the bellicose military establishment of the USA to assist us in developing a coordinated, peaceful approach to cooperation among all countries in the region.

Australia must disassociate itself as a direct ally, always siding with the USA in every conflict or potential conflict. We have been dragged into conflicts again and again by the USA, in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq, with negative consequences for our own population as witnessed by the recent release of the Brereton report regarding war crimes by Australian soldiers in Afghanistan.

China is the ascending world power, not only in our region but also globally. Australia must learn how to use diplomacy effectively to develop neutrality and peaceful coexistence with China and all our neighbours. Having a formal military agreement with the USA and the possibility of being used as a base for the proposed First Fleet would undermine our security and the possibility of peaceful coexistence within our region.

Australia should move away from all military agreements with the USA, including Pine Gap and stationing of USA troops in Darwin, while maintaining friendly relations with the USA and all other countries, including China. Our best defense would be to increase our diplomatic efforts and socio-economic collaboration throughout the region. A military response to any challenges is untenable and unwise.

Sincerely,
Pamela Collett
Narrabundah, ACT

References:

Navy Secretary Kenneth Braithwaite called for the Navy to establish a new numbered fleet closer to the border of the Indian and Pacific Oceans – perhaps out of Singapore – to more fully address the naval challenges in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command area of the world.

<https://news.usni.org/2020/11/17/secnav-braithwaite-calls-for-new-u-s-1st-fleet-near-indian-pacific-oceans>

Even as an expeditionary group, the fleet is still going to need support from allies to supply and sustain it, raising delicate questions for countries in the region about how far they would be prepared to go to accommodate an enhanced and more regular US naval presence.

Whenever Mr Braithwaite has previously touted the idea, Singapore has usually been named as a country likely to help out due to its proximity to the Strait, coupled with large shipyard and fuelling capacities in the city-state.

Australia has long supported the US Navy and Marines through exercises, port visits and training rotations in the Northern Territory and any expansion in the region could see that support extended further.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-03/us-plans-to-restore-navys-1st-fleet/12946076>

It would be deemed unacceptable for the island nation - among Washington's key strategic partners in Southeast Asia - to host a permanent US naval base, as it worked "assiduously" to repel the impression that it was in a formal military alliance with Washington, said Singapore-based regional security expert Collin Koh.

There is a substantial difference between enabling limited US navy deployment from Singapore, with a rather small footprint, and facilitating a numbered fleet basing," the RSIS' Suorsa said. "Basing a larger naval contingent at a foreign port would require substantial resources and infrastructure at the host country. In Singapore's case this would require huge expansion of any existing infrastructure. I don't see it as politically feasible for Singapore to make such a move."

<https://www.msn.com/en-xl/news/other/a-us-navy-first-fleet-in-the-indian-ocean-based-out-of-singapore-not-likely-analysts-say/ar-BB1b8uoe>