

Questioning the Value of the Australia/US Alliance

Submission to the 2015 Defence White Paper

Marrickville Peace Group

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Email: marrickvillepeacegroup@gmail.com

<http://marrickvillepeacegroup.org/>

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This is an updated version of MPG's original submission to the Defence White Paper.

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Executive Summary

- The US alliance is at the core of Australia's defence strategy.
- It has led Australia into multiple wars of questionable benefit.
- The invasion of Iraq in 2003 is an example.
- An enlightened strategic policy would keep us out of unnecessary conflicts.
- The US alliance compromises Australia's independence.
- It raises regional tensions.
- It is not in Australia's best interests.
- Despite these considerations, since 2009 there are many examples of how Australia continues to move closer to the US militarily.
- No coherent reasons for continuing along this path have been provided by the Australian government.

1. The Marrickville Peace Group (MPG)

MPG has existed since 2002. It contributed submissions to both the 2009 and 2013 DWPs. The theme of both of submissions was that the alliance between Australia and the US does not serve Australia's best interests.

The group does not resile from anything it wrote in 2008 or 2012. Indeed, events since 2009 have made matters more urgently concerning.

2. Australia's Defence Policy

It is clear, from the White Papers of 2009 and 2013, and from many public pronouncements made by governments of either major party, that at the absolute core of Australia's defence policy is the alliance between this country and the United States of America. There is a presumption that Australia's security is actually dependent upon this alliance and a corresponding presumption that it must be maintained and constantly strengthened. This is the 'received wisdom' and it is evident throughout the Defence Issues Paper (2014). All discussion and consideration of defence issues rests on the premise that the US alliance is paramount.

MPG questions the validity of this premise. From looking at recent history it concludes that the alliance with the US has led Australia into needless wars, compromises Australia's independence and should be critically scrutinized. Meanwhile, the entrenched policy continues to make the alliance closer and tighter.

Since the end of the Second World War, Australia has been involved in wars in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq. There are certain factors common to each of these engagements. In each of them:

- Australian forces fought a long way from our shores;
- Our forces were not fighting in Australia's defence;
- None of the countries in which we fought posed any sort of threat to this country;

- None of them was even capable of being a realistic threat to Australia's security;
- In each instance we were drawn into actual conflict because of our alliance with the US.

There is a clear pattern that has been repeated over several decades.

Consider the war in Iraq that began with the invasion in 2003. Despite the fact that the invasion probably violated international law, Australia willingly took part – at the behest of the US.

It was an unnecessary and destructive war that at enormous expense achieved no positive benefit for this or any other country. Its legacy is the current turmoil across the Middle East. Getting involved was bad for Australia, bad for Iraq, bad on every count. These bad outcomes indicate failings in the policy.

The reasons for Australia (and other countries) getting involved were provided by intelligence originating in the US, that we now know was false – i.e. we were led in on the strength of falsehood.

Getting involved in war is as grave a step for a country to take as any that can be imagined. For a country to be led into a futile war on the basis of falsehoods, as Australia was, is a terribly serious matter.

The sequence of events, which repeated the pattern laid down in earlier conflicts, should have caused those who make decisions about defence policy to question the core relationship that brought it about. Indeed, the decision-makers had and have a responsibility to ask questions about why we ever got involved.

However, judging by the events that have taken place since the awful ones of 2003, those questions have not been asked. Apparently, Australia has an unquestioning confidence in the US alliance and an unwillingness to critically appraise the failings evident in the policy of dependence on this alliance.

The nation entrusts its security to what might be termed the 'defence establishment' - the group that decides on defence policy. The general public does need to know exactly who this group is, but, normally, it should feel confident that it makes wise decisions. Following the events in Iraq, MPG no longer has that confidence.

Rather than a rational and logical response to the Iraq debacle – which should have meant raising very serious concerns about the US alliance – all the Australian people have witnessed in the intervening years is its further ‘enhancement’. It is as though the defence establishment is unable to think objectively and unable to address and question its failures and mistakes.

The policy of making the US alliance central to Australia’s defence failed this country very seriously indeed in Iraq. Logically, that failure provided good reasons for pausing and weighing up the value of the alliance. It was not a sound reason for going into the alliance deeper and yet deeper. Post Iraq, there is no wisdom in continuing to affirm the value of the US alliance.

3. Events Since 2009

Australia’s complete commitment to the US alliance is illustrated by looking at events that have taken place since the 2009 DWP, during which time Australia and the US have become much closer, militarily.

3.1 Stationing of US Marines in Darwin

The most prominent event in this process was the stationing of US marines in Darwin, announced to Australia by US President Obama in November 2011.

Having foreign troops stationed on our territory is a major departure. These are the armed forces of a foreign country. They wear a different uniform. They march under a foreign flag and they take their orders from a foreign government. In other circumstances, having foreign troops on your land would indicate either that your country has been invaded or that it is under such dire threat of invasion that you have appealed for foreign assistance. Neither of these scenarios match the current situation. Australia is not under threat and has not been invaded. And one of the things we are now destined to learn, to our cost, is that now that we have foreign troops here, it will be very hard to dislodge them.

What is the rationale behind the decision to invite or allow foreign troops to be stationed on Australian territory? What is the real, strategic benefit that accrues to Australia from this US military establishment here? MPG and others have been trying to obtain answers to these questions from the Australian government since April 2012. The answers provided have been unsatisfactory.

For example, in June this year Senator Lee Rhiannon put in writing the following questions to the Minister for Foreign Affairs:

For what strategic reasons did Australia agree to the 'rotational deployment' of US marines to Australian territory in November 2011, especially when there is no military threat to Australia?

And "What is the reason for this departure from previous practice?"

The answer provided to the Senator is as follows:-

Australia's alliance with the United States (US) remains vital to our security and defence arrangements. The initiatives are an extension of Australia's existing defence cooperation and arrangements and are consistent with Australia's longstanding strategic interests in supporting US engagement in the Asia-Pacific in a manner that promotes peace and stability. The initiatives provide tangible benefits to Australia through enhanced Australian Defence Force training opportunities and improved interoperability with US forces. These initiatives are about improving cooperation between Australia, the US, and other countries in the region.

The US alliance may be vital to Australia's defence arrangements, in the sense that it is clearly central to those arrangements – but this should not be mistaken for saying that the alliance is vital for Australia's defence or security. MPG would argue that the contrary is true. From MPG's perspective, the alliance compromises Australia's security, because our support for 'US engagement in the Asia-Pacific', so far from serving our 'longstanding strategic interests' actually adds to regional tensions – making it contrary to Australia's interests. The alliance has not and does not promote peace and stability. It has needlessly drawn Australia into conflicts (mentioned above) and it is adding to the tensions that exist between China and Japan. The US pivot to the Asia Pacific, which amounts to a military build-up in the region, is not a contribution to peace. Peace is not created or preserved by any one country trying to impose it through military might.

MPG also doubts that 'improved interoperability with US forces' is exclusively beneficial. It has come to mean that Australian forces can operate with no forces other than those of the US. As ex-Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser has explained in his

book *Dangerous Allies*¹, internal military communications are now dependent on US-owned and controlled systems (see also '3.5', below).

But besides re-affirming the premise that the US alliance is 'vital', much of the answer given to Senator Rhiannon explains that Australia must extend its relationship with the US because it is already so longstanding. The length and depth of the relationship are among the main reasons and justification for making it even deeper. Similarly, interoperability has become one of the reasons for increasing interoperability.

These circular and self-justifying arguments are devoid of logical substance.

After more than two years of asking, there has been no logical, strategic argument provided to the public to properly justify the establishment of US marines in Darwin.

Senator Rhiannon also asked:

Bearing in mind the fact that, according to a Ministerial Statement of June 26, 2013, 'Full Knowledge and Concurrence' does not mean that Australia approves every activity undertaken, has the Australian government sought an assurance from the US government that the marines deployed to Darwin will not take part in any military action in our region without prior approval from the Australian government?

(a) If such an assurance has not been sought, will the government seek it?

(b) If not, why not?

The answer to this question was:

Full Knowledge and Concurrence is an expression of Australian sovereignty, of Australia's fundamental right to know what activities foreign governments conduct in, through or from Australian territory or national assets.

The activities at all Australian Defence facilities, including Australia's joint facilities and those to which the US has access, are managed in a manner which is consistent with Australia's national interests.

When a simple 'Yes' or 'No' would have been the straightforward answer.

It is reasonable to conclude, and MPG is now convinced, that the Australian government has neither sought nor received any such assurance - meaning that the

US marines could be engaged in military action without prior approval from the Australian government.

An assurance should have been sought – especially when engaging as closely as we are with a nation that now has an established reputation for engaging in pre-emptive military actions.

The scenario, of US marines engaging in military action from their position in Darwin, without any involvement by the Australian government, is entirely possible – as Mr Fraser has also argued².

This possibility was also revealed by US Admiral Samuel Locklear, when he addressed the Senate Committee on Armed Services about the US Pacific Command posture on March 25 2014.³

In his address, Admiral Locklear stated:

USPACOM is working closely with the Australian Defence Staff to advance U.S. force posture initiatives including the Marine Rotational Forces in Darwin and dispersed rotational U.S. Air Force capabilities at Royal Australian Air Force bases. Increased rotational presence in Australia with a more robust bilateral training and exercise program continues to enhance U.S.-Australia interoperability and regional stability. (p. 11)

In addition:

*The USPACOM joint forces are like an ‘arrow.’ Our forward stationed and consistently rotational forces - the point of the ‘arrow’ - represent our credible deterrence and the ‘fight tonight’ force necessary for immediate crisis and contingency response. Follow-on-forces from the continental U.S. required for sustained operations form the ‘shaft of the arrow’. Underpinning these forces are critical platform investments and the research and development needed to ensure **our continuous dominance**. (Emphasis added, pp. 17-18)*

As a consequence, MPG and other groups across the nation, notably the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network and the Australian Anti-Bases Campaign Coalition, are deeply disturbed by US marines establishing a military presence on Australian territory.⁴

These groups do not subscribe to the view that the presence affords Australia a greater level of protection from any would-be enemy – on the contrary, they argue that the marines' presence gives Australia the appearance in the region of being ready to join in any military action the US may care to initiate. We seriously damaged our international reputation by joining the US in the invasion of Iraq. The presence of the US marines simply causes that reputation further damage. It is likely to deepen any anxiety within our region about Australia's military intentions and actually has the potential to make us enemies where previously we had none.

With little hard information being forthcoming from Australian government sources, it has been instructive to look to sources in the US, in seeking to understand the reasons behind the Darwin deployment.

Reference is made here to a report from the US Centre for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA), entitled *Gateway to the Indo-Pacific. Australian defense strategy and the future of the Australia-US alliance*. In this report can be read such statements as "America's strong ties with Australia provide it with the means to preserve US influence and military reach across the Indo-Pacific." To this end, Australia is described as a "supportive sanctuary", at a safe distance from China's missiles and strike aircraft. The report promotes ways in which Australia could make matters even better for US military reach, for example by advocating the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines.⁵

Two main points arise. Throughout the report China is openly considered a potential enemy of both the US and Australia, and Australia is viewed as a convenient location for the projection of US military power.

According to the report, by providing US marines access to Darwin, Australia has 'crossed the Rubicon' of declaring its intent in "the burgeoning Sino-US competition in the Asia-Pacific". By sharing our facilities, we have taken sides.

Cui bono? Who benefits? Who benefits from the stationing of US marines in Darwin?

The presence of the marines in Darwin gives Australia no strategic benefit. It is not about protecting Australia or promoting peace and stability. Instead it is about the US projecting its own power further into our region, to the extent that China would now be well justified in feeling itself being encircled by a potentially hostile alliance.

3.2 Purchase of US Weaponry

In the last six years there has been a sharp increase in purchases of US weaponry. This is consistent with our obsession with the alliance, which pre-disposes us towards US defence contracts.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Australia purchases 10% of all US weapons exports, making it the US's biggest customer, and is the seventh-largest importer of major arms in the world.⁶

The report shows that Australian imports of major military material jumped by 83% in the five years to 2013.

Just one example of Australia's predisposition to buy from the US is the Lockheed Martin F35 Joint Strike Fighter, the single most expensive military purchase it has ever made.

The public has been told that the purchase provides an opportunity for Australian businesses. It is also argued that Australia's involvement in the F35 project is good for 'interoperability'. No logical, strategic justification for the purchase has been made available. Experts from various quarters have questioned the military value of the aircraft, which appears to be an offensive, rather than defensive, weapon. The purchase represents a major diversion of funds that might have been much better spent – even within the area of defence!

In the ABC's 7.30 Report on September 4, 2014 there was an item entitled 'Have Australians been manipulated over the purchase of new fighter jets?'⁷

At enormous cost, Australia's strategic interests have been subordinated to those of US business. Because of the alliance, Australia is now tied into a deal in which the commercial interests of US weapons manufacturer, Lockheed Martin, seem paramount.

3.3 Guided Missile Frigate HMAS Sydney

In another illustration of Australia's deepening military involvement with the US, an Australian warship, the guided missile frigate *HMAS Sydney* has been embedded into the US Seventh Fleet in the Pacific for a period of three months in 2013 and 2014.⁸

The purpose of this deployment is to operate in a strike group with the primary function of protecting the American aircraft carrier, the *USS George Washington*.

It is significant that the report indicates that the *HMAS Sydney* joined the fleet in Yokosuka in Japan. There has been a recent strengthening of tri-partite military ties between Australia, the US and Japan.

As with the US marines in Darwin, from China's perspective, the presence of an Australian warship in the US fleet can only serve to highlight the perception that Australia is joining Japan and the US in a military challenge to China.

3.4 Major General Richard Burr

In February 2013 it was announced that Major General Richard Burr of the ADF was taking a position as deputy commander of the US Army in the Pacific. This bizarre melding of US and Australian military command has very serious implications for Australia. From which government the general receives his instructions, has not been made clear.⁹

In June 2014 the general was photographed in Mongolia, during joint Mongolian/US military exercises. In the photograph he was wearing his Australian uniform.

From the perspective of any nation in our region, an Australian officer commanding US troops is indicative of a process of merging of Australia's armed forces into those of the US. The fact that General Burr was in Mongolia during joint exercises could, quite likely, add to China's sense of encirclement.

3.5 Intelligence Gathering and Electronic Surveillance

Australia has a lengthy history of co-operating with the US in intelligence-gathering and electronic surveillance, especially through the joint facility at Pine Gap. Over the years this co-operation has tended towards complete integration. There are many examples.

Following AUSMIN 2010, US space radar is being transferred to North West Cape.

On July 8 2014, it was reported that a US agency had published plans to construct a support facility for the 'Wideband Global SATCOM' (or WGS) system of military communication near Geraldton in WA.¹⁰

On September 15 2014 an ABC report indicated that the sixth satellite (of a total of ten in the WGS constellation) had been launched by the US in August 2013. Australia paid \$1 billion for this satellite. According to the report, former Deputy Air Force Chief John Blackburn acknowledged that buying into the WGS system marked a

significant change in communications technology. He pointed out that it means that Australia is now a part of the US system – with consequently diminished independence.¹¹

In the same report Professor Richard Tanter claimed that WGS constituted ‘enabling technology’ for the global reach of drones (see ‘3.6’, below). Professor Tanter has published numerous papers questioning the extensive nature of the US alliance¹². Similarly Peter Van Ness, a veteran ANU specialist on Chinese foreign policy, has been quoted as saying, “From China, the problem is not American bases in Australia, it is that Australia is an American base.”¹³

Malcolm Fraser has argued that, because of this reliance on US communications systems, Australia now cannot conduct military operations unless the US approves them.¹⁴

3.6 Use of Drones in the ‘War on Terror’

Since 2009 there has been a rise in the reported use of drones in the ‘War on Terror’ and a corresponding rise in the number of suspected killings of civilians, without due legal process. Reports in the media have made it clear that the electronic surveillance facility at Pine Gap is very likely involved in the guidance of US weaponised drones.

See, for example, Phil Dorling in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (July 21, 2013)¹⁵ and Professor Desmond Ball on ABC News (August 13, 2014). Professor Ball is reported as arguing that Pine Gap now fuses intelligence-gathering and military operations together.¹⁶

A United Nations report has concluded that 30 out of 37 drone strikes it investigated demand a public explanation of the circumstances and a justification for the use of deadly force under international law, because of suspected civilian deaths and unjustified, extra-judicial killings.¹⁷

MPG has exchanged correspondence with successive Ministers for Foreign Affairs in an effort to gain more information about this matter. The concern is that Australia might be legally implicated, if drones guided from facilities on Australian soil have been used in a manner that violates the UN Charter and international law. The Ministers have not conceded that joint facilities are involved in guiding drones, however, neither have they denied the allegation.

The correspondence from the Minister's office assures MPG that Australia urges all countries to ensure that their weapons comply with international law. MPG is not aware that this urging extends to the US, where it is making use of Australian-based facilities in legally questionable operations. Nor, despite its position on the UN Security Council, is Australia putting any pressure on the US to provide the explanations and justifications recommended by UN Heyns¹⁸ and Emmerson Reports.¹⁹

Australia's willing complicity in the, possibly illegal, US program of drone strikes against suspected terrorists, is further indication of the extent to which it is being led by its adherence to the US alliance and is unwilling to critically examine any US military activity.

3.7 AUSMIN

Every year Australian and US officials conduct high-level talks about defence at the AUSMIN meetings. The communiqués that follow AUSMIN generally give the US more access to Australian facilities and makes Australian forces more closely integrated with those of the US. A process in which Australia's military independence is being lost, and strategic dependence upon the US becoming more entrenched, is evident.

In 2014, a legally binding Force Posture Agreement (FPA) with a duration of 25 years was adopted.²⁰ Under the FPA, the US marine presence in Darwin is to be enlarged; there will be increased naval and aircraft co-operation; greater interoperability; greater collaboration in strategic planning with the defence industry and even an Australian contribution to ballistic missile defence in the region.

3.8 Afghanistan

Australia became involved in Afghanistan as soon as the US military did. Indeed, at the time (2001), it was reported that Australian SAS forces were the very first foreign troops to set foot on the ground. It turned out to be the longest war in which Australia has ever been involved. The nation lost 40 military personnel. The outcome is far from satisfactory and, from the report cited below, it appears that we will have forces remaining there (integrated with US forces) for some time yet.

No real, strategic benefit to Australia has been gained. We went in there purely because of our loyalty to the US alliance.

3.9 NATO

It has been reported that President Obama has announced that Australia is to become an 'enhanced partner' within NATO.²¹

It is appropriate to remark that NATO stands for 'North Atlantic Treaty Organisation'. The North Atlantic is, literally, at the opposite end of the Earth to Australia.

The reason given for this development is that it is in recognition of Australia's contribution in Afghanistan.

Our involvement in NATO only makes sense in the context of our alliance with the US (we would never have become involved otherwise). There is no strategic reason associated with the defence of Australia that makes good sense out of this development. It is purely a matter of further integration within the US's global, military network. NATO has expanded eastwards in recent decades, to the extent that Russia now feels itself under threat. The situation in the Ukraine is a very real threat to world peace. Australia's involvement can only be explained by the fact that it raises our profile as a loyal partner to the US.

3.10 Nuclear Weapons

A joint statement calling for the elimination of all nuclear weapons was presented to the UN General Assembly (Disarmament and International Security) Committee on October 21, 2013. The statement was signed by 124 countries and initiated by New Zealand.

Despite its professed commitment to disarmament and non-proliferation, Australia did not sign the statement - instead claiming, in an alternative statement, that a ban on nuclear weapons would not guarantee their elimination.

Based on documents released under freedom of information, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) revealed that Australia had led a secret diplomatic exercise to undermine New Zealand's initiative. The justification for this was that Australia relies on US nuclear forces to deter any nuclear attack on Australia.

Evidently, Australia has abandoned a principled stand against nuclear weapons, in favour of the 'extended nuclear deterrence' that our military alliance with the US supposedly provides.²²

3.11 Talisman Sabre

Every two years Australia and the US conduct joint military exercises called Talisman Sabre at Shoalwater Bay in Queensland. The number of troops involved in these exercises increases regularly – from 11,000 in 2005, to 22,500 in 2011 and 27,000 in 2013. These high level bi-lateral training exercises are another dimension of the close military ties between Australia and the US military.

3.12 Islamic State

In September it was announced that Australia was to join the US and other countries in attacking the Islamic State or IS. The emergence of IS as a force in the Middle East can be directly attributed to the military intervention in the area, to which Australia was a party. We became involved because of our adherence to the US alliance and are now involving ourselves all over again, at huge expense, for the same reason.

The sad events in the Middle East should, logically, give us cause to question the wisdom of getting involved again. Intervention failed previously. There is no indication that it will not fail this time round. We are again engaging in warfare, when there is no military 'solution' in sight.

Each of the events listed above indicate that the defence establishment has no way of looking at Australia's defence other than through the lens of the US alliance. What has resulted is a process of absorption into the US military machine, with consequent loss of strategic independence. This is no gradual process. Paradoxically, since the war in Iraq and since the 2009 DWP it even appears to have gathered pace.

3.13 Dangerous Allies

However, there was one other event that took place since 2009 that is worthy of mention here – that is the publication of Malcolm Fraser's book *Dangerous Allies*.

Fraser's main argument is that the alliance between Australia and the US rests on the idea of strategic dependence – the idea that Australia is incapable of being fully independent. He argues that Australia no longer needs to be dependent on any foreign power. He explains that dependence on the US alliance has already involved Australia in wars it did not need to fight – and that it continues to place the nation at risk of further involvements. He argues that American 'exceptionalism', the belief that it is destined to lead the entire world into a model of its own system, is behind the tendency to seek military solutions to essentially diplomatic problems.

Fraser highlights the potential for conflict arising between China and Japan over the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. He points out that China has a legitimate claim to these islands, dating from the nineteenth century, when it was disadvantaged by treaties imposed by colonial powers. He notes that Japan has become more strident in its language since the government of Prime Minister Abe took power, and also that the US has clearly indicated that it will support Japan in the event of actual hostilities breaking out. Fraser sees the situation as highly dangerous. He explains that, in the event of hostilities between China and Japan, Australia will be unable to remain neutral, because of its ties with the US. By entwining its military so closely with that of the US, it has already indicated its partiality – and, in any case, it has also emphasised its close friendship with Japan. In this scenario, any outbreak of fighting between China and Japan will automatically make Australia the enemy of China and, given the presence of US military establishments here, the target for attacks.

One of the key objectives of true defence should be to minimize the risk of the nation becoming embroiled in war – unless that is absolutely necessary. Fraser’s perspective is that, so far from minimizing the risk of Australia being drawn into war, the US alliance increases the probability of that happening.

Fraser’s position is summed up by the title of his book. To him it is clear that the US is a dangerous country to have as an ally.

4. Conclusion

In November 2011, US President Barack Obama said, when addressing Australian troops in Darwin, “You can’t tell where our guys end and you guys begin...”²³ The defence establishment might view this as something to be proud of. The reality is that, from the perspective of the true defence of Australia, it should cause real concern. If Australia’s military cannot be distinguished from that of the US, then every enemy of the US automatically becomes the enemy of Australia. From a strategic angle, Australia needs the smallest possible number of enemies. We should be very careful of close association with the country that probably boasts more enemies than any other.

On the basis of the argument developed in this submission, MPG emphasises the following:

- The US ‘pivot’ threatens regional stability;

- The alliance compromises Australia’s strategic independence;
- The US has a track record of leading Australia into unnecessary, de-stabilising military interventions;
- But Australia’s defence policy continues to strengthen this dangerous alliance and maintain that it is ‘vital’ to Australia’s security.

MPG says that there is a question that is even more vital: Where is the wisdom in Australia being so totally dependent on the US and on US-made policy in the matter of its strategic defence?

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