Dear Mr Deane

Thank you for your letter of 11 August 2014, on behalf of the Marrickville Peace Group, regarding the role of Major General Rick Burr as the Deputy Commanding General - Operations United States (US) Army Pacific.

Positions such as Major General Burr’s are not uncommon, although Major General Burr is the most senior Army officer posted to another nation in a Command position. In his capacity as a Deputy Commanding General of US Army Pacific, Major General Burr must receive instruction and direction from the US Army. However, Major General Burr’s primary allegiance is to Australia and the Department of Defence has the responsibility to ensure that Major General Burr is appropriately employed. The Australian Army and the Australian Defence Force (ADF) have in place mechanisms for such appointments to ensure that Australia’s interests in the Asia-Pacific region and the individuals placed into such positions of authority are not compromised.

While Major General Burr is assigned to a position within the US Army, his key responsibilities are to represent the ADF, and to gain knowledge and experience through the duties he undertakes. While effectively ‘serving two masters’, his primary allegiance remains to Australia. This relationship ensures that there is an appropriate level of communication and collaboration between our two nations, and that our efforts serve to benefit the region.

Australia and the US have a very strong relationship built on a common understanding and respect of each other’s interests. Appointments such as Major General Burr’s reinforce this relationship and are important to our national interests. As a professional military officer with a distinguished career, Major General Burr is adept at balancing the requirements of the US Army and the needs of the ADF. To date he has carried out his duties with distinction.
ADF personnel assignments within the US Army are well scrutinised prior to, and during their respective appointments. I am confident the mechanisms that are in place do not inhibit either Australia’s or the US’s collective efforts in the Asia-Pacific region.

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely

David Johnston

- 8 OCT 2014