

'The Marines are coming. Should we be worried?'

Sunday Seminar Address by Denis Doherty and Dr Hannah Middleton
from the Australian Anti-Bases Campaign Coalition
for Catholics In Coalition for Justice and Peace, September 2012

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Denis Doherty: Australia's role in promoting and fostering war

If you take the Australian population as whole they can be divide into 2 parties, not the ALP or Libs but those who are for war and those against. It may come as a surprise that those against war or at least the war in Afghanistan are in the majority, around 67% - a good number.

The 'War party' does not respond to the arguments that war is bad, costly, ruins environments, results in there being mounds of dead bodies and thousands of raped women. They think the cost is worth it. Benito Mussolini said "Only war brings to the highest tension the energies of man and imprints the signs of nobility on those who have the virtue to confront it." Then he wrecked his country and was murdered and hung upside down in a town square....

Gillard and Abbott say when 5 Australians are killed in Afghanistan we have to stay the course.

While Mal Washer a Lib says 'we the MPs have blood on our hands – we are only there to appease the US.'

The War party has control of the media and the parliament and people in the social justice movement have to wrest control from them.

War is not the only source of greatness or heroes.

War has been made sacred, but need not be. A sense of community can be created through projects other than mass murder.

This culture allows us to support US unquestioningly. This war culture allows the media to be uncritical and silent about military policy spending. It makes most politicians afraid to do anything but be 'yes men' for the military.

This culture hides and gives a rationale for the Department of Defence to be uncontrollable and unaccountable. It makes opening up the bureaucracy to scrutiny almost impossible.

War is on our minds. It's in our streets, in our workplaces, in our entertainment and all around us. We have monuments to war all over the place and new ones are being built all the time.

We have games, violent ones based on various wars with great sounding names like 'call of duty', there are toys for the younger ones and even babies can be wrapped in camouflage nappies and little hats. I recently saw a birthday cake in a shop window in Campbelltown, the cake was in camouflage colours, a toy tank on top and a few quivering toy soldiers hiding behind a lamington and around this montage was the message 'happy ninth birthday Roy'. We don't just get weeds out – we have to use Roundup or Defender to fight the snails, Raid to kill cockroaches.

The Government feeds this monster and enlivens it. The Gillard Gov is putting aside \$63 million for the commemoration of Gallipoli in 2015.

The outrageous use of Gallipoli and ANZAC day as the birth of nation, the bleeding of the nation, as if we came together on that stupid day and as if all the work of recent past century to liberate Australians from the convict era, Eureka and the establishment of Trade Unions in Australia count for nothing. ANZAC day seeks not to tell the truth of the Gallipoli campaign but to provide the culture for the excesses of the military today.

Let's just remind ourselves of 1915 and Australia at the time. Australians voted against conscription admittedly by a narrow margin but still we can claim that the country was split evenly on Australia's participation in that war.

War on poverty, war on drugs and war on Terror have all been declared and declared lost with no progress on any of those issues.

If you thought that Government was a careful and efficient caretaker of the nation's resources throw away that thought immediately. A partial list of defence projects that are over-budget and mishandled is pretty impressive:

The \$16 billion F-35 Joint Strike Fighter is well on the way to becoming as iconic a debacle as the Collins Class Submarine. The Seasprite helicopter was cancelled in 2008, because it was already running 7 years late and we'd already spent \$1 billion on it.

The Wedgetail airborne early warning program is 4 years overdue. The Tiger armed Reconnaissance helicopter, also 4 years overdue, is mired in contractual disputes. The upgrade of the M113 armed personnel carriers are 3 years overdue.

In fact the word POOR appears a lot in the auditor's report on the military. Poor budgeting practices, poor lines of responsibility, poor contract management, poor project administration.

This is from a media report written in 2010 – a recent example I noticed was the mothballing of the 50 Abrams tanks bought from the US second-hand for \$500 million. Millions have been set aside in the budget to mothball them. This was despite the uproar that the tanks caused when they were purchased. Commentators and the peace movement said they were too heavy for Australian conditions and couldn't be transported overseas in our equipment. The Government then went out and purchased massive planes to transport all at a cost of many hundreds of millions - now the tanks are in mothballs.

This list of stuff ups is not exhaustive.

It is almost as if the military is constitutionally incapable of buying new stuff without being overcharged and without any assurances that it will be delivered. This is clearly a Department out of control and unaccountable. And the sacrifice of several Heads of Department has not changed the situation at all. This is what you get from a Department that is not quarantined from cuts.

Let me illustrate the extent of our spending on the military and how it holds back the country.

In the Howard and Rudd eras defence spending was quarantined and guaranteed to go up by 3% each year till 2018. It didn't take long to reach 50% increase of spending while everything else went down or was held at a level. Infrastructure was allowed to deteriorate, health found hospital waiting lists going up, etc.

Spending by now should be around \$33 billion but it was reduced last year by \$5 billion so it hovers around \$25 billion. This is still a large sum and still there is no evidence that the Government is going to drop major projects – they are just suspended for the time being.

This \$25 billion figure is roughly what they spend on education each year. Spending is around \$68 million per day. On a per capita basis, Smith claims we are the 2nd highest spender!

All this in a country that has no enemies and is under no threat.

China

There are 2 Chinas in Australian minds: one is the bottomless market and the other a menacing one.

Ross Babbage, one of the authors of the 2009 White Paper on Defence, as well as a noted cold war warrior, right winger and founder of a pro-military think tank called 'Kododa Foundation says It would contain in a careful mix of capabilities that could in extremis rip the arm of any major power that sought to attack China.

Australia now has an Aunty Jack military policy.

Just three years ago Australians were told in the 2009 White Paper on Defence that there was a possibility, long term but startling nonetheless, that in the decades to come they might be fighting a war against China. This possibility of conflict with a superpower, their major trading partner and a crucial pillar of the Australian economy, would require building a very potent ADF with 12 big new submarines, a giant landing ship able to carry 1,000 troops, tanks and the works, air warfare destroyers to protect the lot and about 100 revolutionary Joint Strike Fighters.

Consider the cost implications of just three of the planned purchases: the twelve new subs, 100 F-35 joint strike fighters, 3 air warfare destroyers – the combined cost \$47 billion. Assuming very conservatively that their through-life cost is three times their purchase price, this amounts to \$188 billion. That is what we are signing up to. And of course going on past evidence we do not know if any of these things will be delivered, despite the myriad of other needs brought on by climate change and the upgrade of infrastructure such as rail, roads etc and the ever present needs of health and education.

The description of the problem is the first step, the main task is to change it.

- a) The military have to be held to account in Parliament, but how can this be done if Labor and the Liberals are as one on the issue? I would be surprised if many here knew the opposition shadow minister for defence –Senator David Johnston. He is hardly ever sighted or quoted. There is little or no debate on military matters.

Even if we go to war the Parliament doesn't get a say. Instead just the inner cabinet of 5 makes the decision. Parliament should debate the issue and this terrible decision should be made by the whole Parliament.

- b) The media are compliant and unbalanced when it comes to military matters. Since the widely reported charge of bias against the ABC by the Howard Government Minister Alston in the lead up to the Iraq war 2003, the ABC avoids the issue like the plague. On the rare occasions when they do cover military matters they deal with them by having a Government spokesman, usually Stephen Smith the Minister, and this is followed by a comment by Neal James of the Australian Defence Association, an arms company-funded think tank. In other words we get 2 similar opinions on military matters. Where is the balance?

- c) Reform from inside the military – recent reforms have been in the shape of a new military justice system, gays in the military and women in various roles – all important issues but they do not go to heart of the issue. Why is our military so bloated and so out of control? It is clear that the clear that the Government and Parliament are not exercising any control and the media is not any help. Internal reforms are not dealing with the basic problems so perhaps we could look to community control?
- d) Official community involvement started about 8 years ago with government community forums on the defence white papers. The forums were run with astounding conflicts of interest, firstly by Peacock, a former defence minister, and then by former NSW ALP Senator and now Thales armaments company director Stephen Loosely. Both of these enquiries followed a 'yes minister' pattern – don't hold an enquiry unless you are sure you can get the answer you want. These 2 enquiries delivered the answer 'Yes, spend more, more!' They ignored those who were saying spend less.

We do not have to accept that the military have to have carte blanche with their processes. As a community we have to put a brake on them from the streets, from our institutions, from our trade unions. The time has come for a peace economy and to get off the war economy.

The Government has announced that it is bringing down a new white paper in 2013. This is clearly a response to new US demands on Australia arising from Obama's pivot towards the Indo-Pacific and Asia.

As a first step we must insist that there be community consultation on this new and probably more expensive planning for the future of the military.

We asked Scott Ludlam of the Greens to ask about the community consultation for the defence white paper during Senate Estimates. In answer to his question a spokesperson for the uncontrollable unaccountable Department said "I do not see at this point - the public consultation process being anything like what was done in 2009. I think it will be concentrating on a couple of what I describe as peak organisations – some of the think tanks, industry groups and so forth – rather than widespread public, town-hall kinds of meetings."

Those who get a say are those who will profit – the fox looking after the hen house operation so that the gravy train rolls on for the arms corporations both here and overseas.

As our postcard says, 'Since we, the people, have to forgo the medical, educational and other services to fund Australia's huge military spending, we should be allowed to submit our views on the 2013 Defence White Paper'.

We ask you to fill in these postcards tonight and to take some to friends and family. Give the signed ones to Hannah before you leave and we will post them for you.

Keep war from our door and IPAN.

Thanks and let's get out there and reverse fight the war party.

Dr Hannah Middleton: Not Safer But Poorer

On November 17 2011 US President Obama said, in a speech to the Australian Parliament: *“The United States is a Pacific power, and we are here to stay.”*

Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard at the same time announced that 250 rising to 2,500 US Marines will be stationed at an Australian base in Darwin in the Northern Territory. The new deal also includes an increased number of visits by US ships and aircraft, greater US access to Australian military bases, more joint military exercises (for ‘interoperability’ so the Australian Defence Force can work effectively under US orders and with US equipment) and the storage of greater amounts of US military material and equipment in Australia.

The decision was announced after many months of secret negotiations. It will have far-reaching local impacts and foreign policy consequences and yet the announcement was made without debate in Parliament or any consultation with Australians.

Recently the Australian Government completed a Force Posture Review which recommended moving Australian military assets to the north and west of the continent. The reason given was protection of major Australian economic assets, including mineral deposits and offshore oil and gas. Actually the Review recommendations, which are already being implemented, are support measures for the US military realignment that threatens to bring war to our doorstep.

The *Wall Street Journal* (27/1/12) indicates that the US marines will use the new forward-staging base in Darwin as a launch pad for Southeast Asia, signalling China that the US has quick-response capability in Beijing's backyard.

Target China

The new doctrine places China at the centre of US “security” concerns and prioritises expansion of US war making capacities in Asia and the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

Hilary Clinton, writing last November in *Foreign Policy*, asserted that the new Asia-Indo-Pacific focus puts the US *“in the best position to sustain our leadership, secure our interests, and advance our values...”*

“Open markets in Asia provide the United States with unprecedented opportunities for investment, trade, and access to cutting-edge technology. Our economic recovery at home will depend on exports and the ability of American firms to tap into the vast and growing consumer base of Asia.”

The movement of the majority of US military assets to the region, plus military facilities and deployment of US troops, ships and planes in Australia and so many other countries in Asia and the Indo-Pacific region, gives the US the ability to shut down China's imports of energy and raw materials and to cripple its economy.

China's military expansion is actually small compared to US military. Australia's intelligence community has stated that China's current limited military build-up is not a threat to Australia. Rather it is China's response to the huge US military expansion in the Asia-Pacific region.

Despite the fact that China's military budget is less than one tenth that of the US, China is providing the “enemy” the US military-industrial complex requires.

A new book, *The Kingdom and the Quarry: China, Australia, Fear and Greed*, by David Uren, reveals the existence of a secret chapter in Australia's 2009 Defence White Paper that contemplated war with China.

Not a new policy

President Obama introduced this military realignment at the Pentagon on January 5 this year when he unveiled the policy document entitled *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defence*.

The ideas in this policy document are not actually new.

In 2001 a [strategic review](#) conducted by the Bush administration concluded that: "... the Pacific Ocean should now become the most important focus of U military deployments, with China now perceived as the principal threat to American global dominance" and its number one enemy."

September 11, 2001 sent them in another direction. President Bush shifted focus to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and the projection of American power throughout the Middle East.

Later, on June 4, 2005, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld gave a speech in Singapore, signalling a new emphasis in White House policy making. He criticised what he called China's ongoing military build-up and claimed that it posed a threat to regional peace and stability.

US strategy was spelt out in the Pentagon's 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). This said the United States will not allow the rise of a competing superpower. "Of the major and emerging powers," the QDR says, "China has the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States and field disruptive military technologies that could over time offset traditional U.S. military advantages"

Preparing for war with China will also provide additional super profits for the U.S. armaments corporations. It will be the primary justification for the acquisition of costly new weapons systems

Further US expansion

A report for the US military contains a recommendation to expand America's defence presence in Australia by massively expanding a base in Perth for a US aircraft carrier and supporting fleet. The plan is included as part of one of four options set out in a report by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), commissioned by the Department of Defence.

The third option in the report - formally titled *US Force Posture Strategy in the Asia Pacific Region: An Independent Assessment* - details moving a US carrier strike group to the HMAS Stirling base in Perth. The strike group would include a nuclear powered aircraft carrier, a carrier air wing of up to nine squadrons, one or two guided missile cruisers, two or three guided missile destroyers, one or two nuclear powered submarines and a supply ship.

"Australia's geography, political stability, and existing defence capabilities and infrastructure offer strategic depth and other significant military advantages to the United States in light of the growing range of Chinese weapons systems, US efforts to achieve a more distributed force posture, and the increasing strategic importance of south-east Asia and the Indian Ocean," says the report.

Extraordinary growth

Obama's "pivot" is taking place against the background of the extraordinary growth in US-Australian military and intelligence co-operation over the last decade.

Australia signed on for three new "training bases" with the US military at the annual Australian-US Ministerial Consultations in Washington in July 2004. Facilities at the Shoalwater Bay Training

Area in Queensland and the Bradshaw Land Training Area and Delamere Air Weapons Range in the Northern Territory are being developed at the cost of tens of millions of dollars. The three facilities will be linked with US bases and inter-linked through a node in the Pacific War Fighting Centre in Hawai'i. The Memorandum of Understanding between the US and Australia refers to the need for planes, ships and submarines based in Guam, or rotated to Guam from Hawai'i or the US continent, to have access to training facilities which only Australia can provide.

The commitment to enhanced joint exercises takes Australia further down the path of "interoperability" -- the process of the gradual fusion of the Australian Defence Force into a de-facto arm of the United States military.

Pine Gap, 20 kms southeast of Alice Springs, is one of the largest and most important US war fighting and intelligence bases in the world. It is a satellite ground control station. Pine Gap is connected to the Space Based Infra-Red System (SBIRS), which is a key element in missile defence. It is the most important of at least 30 US military facilities already in Australia.

Space-tracking facilities in Australia are being networked into a regional missile defence system with the Jindalee Operational Radar Network (JORN) to become an increasingly important component of the system.

Darwin is a port city on the northern coast. It is ideally placed to control of the strategic Timor Gap naval passage and for US plans for containment of China.

It is also no accident that Halliburton, US Vice President Dick Cheney's corporation, has recently built what is a strategic railway from Alice Springs (near Pine Gap) to Darwin.

The Australian Government recently signed an agreement to allow US forces to return to North West Cape, (the Harold E Holt military base at Exmouth in West Australia). As well as a US VLF submarine communications base, North West Cape will be the site for the US Space Surveillance Network sensors.

In addition, the Australian Government is already giving much greater attention and money to cyber warfare and is also buying its own drones.

ANZUS alliance

Signed in 1952, the ANZUS treaty underpins Australia's military relationship with the USA.

Despite the views of the Australian public, ANZUS does not contain specific commitments or any guarantees that the US will assist Australia in times of need, even though it speaks vaguely about "consultation" and "action in accordance with constitutional processes".

Unlike NATO, which obliged each country to come to the aid of all signatories, ANZUS only obliged each party to consult if aggression was threatened.

The only times the treat has been invoked in the 60 years since its signing, Australia has ended up paying in one way or another for US strategic interests and US aggression.

It is not a mutual pact. It is a treaty of Australian subservience and a cover for aggression. It subverts Australia's sovereignty, distorts the country's economy, and undermines its citizens' security.

Negative impacts

The alliance with "our great and powerful friend" allegedly serves Australia's security needs but this has never been tested. On the other side of the ledger are the human, financial, environmental, social and political cost to Australians.

The US-Australia military alliance distorts our society. Instead of a focus on sustainable development, socially useful production and the needs of the community, priority is given to supporting US foreign policy, military spending and increasingly repressive social control. The beneficiaries are not our people but the US and Australian militaries together with huge US corporations and some Australian companies.

Economic impacts

Australia's current military spending of over Aus\$80 million a day steals the resources which should be funding human and social needs. Much of this spending is dictated by the equipment needed to fight in coalition with the US, not by Australia's genuine defence needs.

Promises of economic development for all are a mirage. Pubs, restaurants and massage parlours will make lots of money but ordinary people won't see a cent. And Australia's important tourist industry will suffer.

Military spending creates far fewer jobs than spending the same dollars on civilian projects. When the US base at North West Cape (WA) closed down, the neighbouring town of Exmouth experienced an economic boom. Now the base is to re-open.

Preparing for war with China provides additional super profits for the US armaments corporations. It has been and will be the primary justification for the acquisition of costly new weapons systems in Australia too.

Resources committed to the military mean less money for developing strong social cohesion and stability within the nation through employment programs and the health, education and housing needs of Australians and our neighbours.

A feature of military expenditure is its "opportunity costs", that is, the opportunities which are foregone for alternative consumption and investment. Military spending reduces investment and diverts funds and personnel from civilian research and development.

"To advocate an alternative, independent foreign policy would mean a great saving in our defence spending. On a recent ABC TV "Insiders" program, journalist George Megalogenis estimated we could halve Australia's Defence budget. Imagine an additional Aus\$14 billion dollars available for implementing the Gonski Report on Education, additional funding for health, care for the elderly and those with disabilities, investment in alternative energy production and conservation and increase in the allocation for overseas aid." (Alan McPhate, "New Directions in Australian Foreign Policy", Australian Humanist, No.107, 2012)

Environmental impacts

The US military holds an unenviable position as one of the world's worst polluters, and yet the Australian Government has invited them into environmentally significant Australian wilderness.

Considerable environmental problems have developed during the Talisman Sabre joint military exercises, and an increase in war games on Australian soil is on the agenda.

Talisman Sabre is held every second year in world heritage areas, natural heritage listed sites which include indigenous sites and Ramsar wetlands

Environmental impacts identified by the Australian Department of Defence include effects on air quality, potential harm to marine animals (including threatened species such as loggerhead turtles, dugongs and whales), fire potential, noise pollution, waste disposal and spills and erosion from amphibian craft landings and weapon target zones, collisions with marine mammals, and contamination from toxic chemicals including red and white phosphorus and perchlorate.

The Department of Defence does not include the presence of nuclear powered warships within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park as an environmental risk.

A delicate, pristine ecology experiences a blitzkrieg. At a time when climate change dominates our thoughts, the Talisman Sabre war games spew vast amounts of greenhouse gases from all the ships, tanks, planes and explosions which it unleashes. Australia has laws punishing littering but government sanctioned military environmental terrorism is apparently above the law.

Disputes about who is responsible for contamination at the Harold Holt Naval Base in Western Australia (North West Cape) are ongoing between the US and Australian authorities. Such disputes can be expected to increase in the future as the US military footprint in Australia expands.

Social impacts

The majority of the major US bases in Australia are located on Aboriginal land and deny the indigenous people of this country their land rights.

Overseas US bases have become the centre of major social problems. They are linked to increases in violence, prostitution, drugs, alcoholism, rape, sexually transmitted diseases, and abuse of women and children. The Australian experience is similar.

There have been incidents such as United States MPs assaulting Aborigines in an Ipswich (Queensland) pub during the 1997 Tandem Thrust war games and a February 2004 court case in Darwin when two US servicemen were charged with rape. An Anglican Church report from Hobart in Tasmania details frequent sexual assaults on juvenile men and women by US service people.

Communities around US bases have recorded high levels of rapes committed by foreign soldiers, and other violent crimes. It would be foolish not to expect the same to happen in Darwin and around the Stirling naval base in West Australia.

Legal impacts

The 1963 Status of Forces Agreement between Australia and the US holds that in circumstances where an alleged offence is committed by an officer in the course of his or her official duties, Australia has an international obligation to give the US primary jurisdiction to deal with the officer.

This led to Attorney General Robert McClelland issuing a certificate that allowed the killing of a cyclist in Willowbank, Queensland by a US naval officer to be handled by US authorities.

Military impacts

Australia's support for and integration with the US military increases the hostility that the country attracts and increases the risks of it becoming a target. Already Australia's intimacy with the US reportedly makes the nation of far more interest to the intelligence agencies of other states, including China. (Philip Dorling, "Australia, Canada 'primary spy targets' *The Age* 26 July 2012)

As launching platforms for military activities, bases that provide troops, weapons and intelligence are also, by definition, military targets. Military bases destabilise regions and provoke military responses. While ostensibly for national security reasons, bases frequently provoke conflict and create the very insecurity they were intended to prevent.

The expansion of the US missile defence system in Australia will create more regional tension and instability, increasing the possibility of war.

Rory Medcalf asks how increasing Australia's military spending can "avoid conveying a more threatening posture in its region? How would it be possible to prevent this expansion ... from creating great unease in some other countries, encouraging them to devote even more of their

wealth to their own military capabilities?” (Rory Medcalf, “Questioning Australia’s Beowulf Option”, Security Challenges, Vol. 4, Number 2 (Winter 2008), p149)

And of course the ANZUS alliance with the US has embroiled Australia in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan at an enormous financial and human cost.

Loss of sovereignty

By allowing foreign military bases to be established, the host country yields sovereignty over activities involving that facility. The Australian parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Treaties has complained that MPs are kept in the dark about the function and activities of the US base at Pine Gap and are "entrusted with less information than can be found in a public library".

The former Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser points out that Australia's grovelling to Washington is hampering ties with Asia. (Sydney Morning Herald, 24/4/12) There is no doubt that the “deputy sheriff” label has stuck and Australia is viewed with some caution by many of its regional neighbours, undermining the development of economic and political relationships.

Australia’s military relationship with the US undermines the country’s independence as well as making a nonsense of any commitment to disarmament Australia has.

The Medical Association for the Prevention of War criticises the Australia-US Treaty on Defence Trade Co-operation for risking a decrease in arms trade transparency, undermining Australia’s strong support for the UN’s Arms Trade Treaty process.

[http://www.mapw.org.au/files/downloads/Submission%20to%20DECO%20on%20Defence%20Trade%20Controls%20Regulations%202012_Final\(1\).pdf](http://www.mapw.org.au/files/downloads/Submission%20to%20DECO%20on%20Defence%20Trade%20Controls%20Regulations%202012_Final(1).pdf)

In a letter, MAPW President Dr Jenny Grounds argues that the proposal to base nuclear-powered ships and aircraft in Perth would be out of step with the nuclear weapons-free zone to which Australia has been a signatory since 1985. (The Age, 4/8/12)

Greens Senator Scott Ludlam (press release 1Nov2012) makes a similar point when he says the role of North West Cape in supporting the US nuclear-armed submarine fleet is in conflict with Australia’s commitments to nuclear disarmament.

Democratic impacts

An atmosphere of fear and insecurity is being fanned to assist a massive attack on civil liberties. Federal and State legislation, being used first against the Muslim community, is intended to destroy democratic rights and stifle all dissent.

70 per cent of Australians want less money spent on defence and a large majority, 82 per cent, oppose tax increases to pay for more defence spending. (2009 Australian National University poll). Over 70 per cent opposed Australian involvement in the Iraq war. A majority want Australia out of Afghanistan immediately. None of these views have influenced the policies of Labor or Liberal governments.

The Australian Labor Party (right-wing social democrats), the Liberal Party (a conservative organisation), the military and the defence establishment (bureaucracy, academic and business) all support the alliance with the US up to the hilt. Indeed some commentators talk of a pathology which has made any serious debate on the issue inconceivable for over five decades.

Recently, however, the *Australian Financial Review* (9/8/12) has reported a growing split in the ranks of the social democratic Labor Government. Federal Defence Minister Stephen Smith described the US marine deployment to Darwin as just an “evolution in Australia’s long standing

relationship with the US. He also said the US “will continue to be the most important strategic actor in our region for the foreseeable future”.

In contrast a former Labor Prime Minister Paul Keating has said the Federal Government should not back US rivalry against a rising China. His view was supported by Geoff Raby, a former Australian ambassador to China, who criticised the Federal Government’s decision to train US marines in Australia’s north.

In a statement which stunned many commentators, a highly respected former Liberal Prime Minister weighed into the debate about the dangers of the US “pivot”. He said:

Why does the United States talk of rebalancing military power to the Pacific? They already have massive power in the Pacific. More than all other nations combined. Do they really need more, for what purpose?

What useful purpose do marines based in Darwin fulfil? What is the purpose of spy planes on Cocos Island?

Far from contributing to peace and stability in the Western Pacific, they are creating a period of tension and even danger. Why?

Australia should not do anything that suggests that we could be part of a policy of military containment of China, but marines in Darwin, spy planes in Cocos Island make us part of that policy of containment.

This is the wrong way to preserve peace and security. We should not be part of it.

The choice for Australia to make is not for China or for the US, but independence of mind to break with subservience to America. Subservience has not and will not serve Australia's interests. It is dangerous to our future.

Lost opportunities

In a changing strategic environment, there are opportunities for the Australian Government to build a safer, more secure environment. These opportunities are being thrown away.

The regional strategic environment is clearly complex and changing but this does not necessarily mean it is more dangerous.

William Tow paints the picture: “Australia’s traditional preference for allying with a ‘great and powerful friend’ to ensure its economic prosperity and national security is being tested by the growing reality that its future wealth will be determined by its position in Asia — and affected by the remarkable economic growth of China and India — even as Australian policy makers continue to assign strategic prominence to their country’s American alliance.” (William Tow, “Tangled Webs. Security Architectures in Asia”, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, July 2008)

Other analysts suggest that Australia must consider the kind of military capabilities it will need in 2030 with the rise of China and India. But why should we see the rise of these two nations as anything but benign?

Nuclear dangers

The pre-emptive use of nuclear weapons and their mix with conventional weapons to allow “flexibility of choice” is now official US doctrine. (Doctrine for Joint Theatre Nuclear Weapons, February 1996, 3-12.1 viii)

How can we be guaranteed that US nuclear weapons are not based or transited through Australia's land, sea or air and that an Australian inspection regime exists to ensure that this does not happen?

What implications flow from this for the training of the ADF and its involvement in joint military operations with the US military? Are nuclear use tactics practiced in Australia by any troops? Will the Federal Government refuse ADF support for any US military missions while the current doctrine of nuclear first strike exists?

The US Pine Gap base in central Australia is central to the co-ordination of US nuclear strike plans. Will the Federal Government deny use of this facility until the US reverses its first strike policy?

Fight back

The US military "pivot" to Asia and the Indo-Pacific will inevitably create more regional tension and instability, it will provoke a regional arms race with its concomitant threats to budgets and democracy, and it will increase the possibility of war, even nuclear war.

Australian Government active support for the policy brings war to our doorstep, threatens the security of Australian community, and risks relations with Australia's major trading partner, the country credited with getting us through the global financial crisis relatively unscathed. It will cost Australian taxpayers billions of dollars, making us poorer but no safer.

This has provoked a response in the Australian peace movement which has been small and relatively inactive for several years. New networks of peace groups have been established in all the State capitals, recently uniting into a national network, with the aim of raising public awareness and building opposition to Canberra's support for the new Australian policy. This is an optimistic development within a sea of otherwise bad news.