

**Submission to the 2015 Defence White Paper
By Rt Hon Malcolm Fraser AC CH**

Executive Summary

This paper argues that the strategic context, in which Australia must work out its own future, has changed dramatically since the break-up of the Soviet Union. The worldwide threat of communist expansion no longer exists. The United States as a supreme power has changed dramatically. The environment in the Pacific is developing in new and different ways.

The policy of strategic dependence, which suited Australia up to the time of World War I, and indeed, to the end of the Cold War, is no longer appropriate for Australia. To fail to recognise the changed strategic context is to put Australia in serious danger. The stationing of a marine air-ground taskforce based in Darwin and the changed and offensive purposes for which Pine Gap can be used, are developments which would make it impossible for Australia to stay out of any conflict which involved the United States in the Western Pacific.

Thus, a relationship with America, which has been regarded as beneficial, has now become dangerous to Australia's future because of the recent military and communication developments. We have effectively ceded to America the power to decide whether Australia goes to war or not. Even if America was the most perfect and benign power, that situation is, and would be, incompatible with the integrity of Australia as a sovereign nation.

Submission

The government has called for a strategic review of Australian Defence policy. This submission will address one major point, the nature and the extent of our relationship with the United States. It is worth noting, that in the Defence Issues Paper, the guide for the inquiry, many important questions are asked, but the nature of our relationship with the United States is not argued.

In Chapter 3, under the section devoted to “**The United States Alliance and International Engagement**” the guidelines state “*Does Australia continue to need a defence alliance with the United States? The unequivocal answer of all Australian governments and a large majority of the population since the Second World War has been ‘yes.’ Our Alliance with the United States is based on our shared values, support for democracy and the rule of law and many shared strategic perspectives.*” I welcome the fact that the question of our alliance with the United States has been raised in the beginning of this paragraph.

This paper will argue that Australia needs to review its strategic dependence on the United States. There are substantive reasons for this:

- 1 The United States and Australia have substantially different values systems. The idea of American exceptionalism dooms American foreign policy, and is contrary to Australia’s sense of egalitarianism.
- 2 We have seen the United States make a number of ill-advised and ill-informed decisions concerning Eastern Europe, Ukraine and Russia, and the Middle East.
- 3 At the moment, because of offensive United States military installations in Australia, we find that if America goes to war in the Pacific, they take us to war without an independent decision by Australia.
- 4 Under current circumstances, in any major contest in the Pacific, our relationship with America makes us a strategic target for America’s enemy. It is not in our interests to be in that position.

Let me know turn to the specific points.

American Exceptionalism

The breakup of the Soviet Union in 1990/1991 created a different world. It was a world full of opportunity. Opportunity enunciated by President HW George Bush in a speech¹ to Congress after the first Gulf War, whose purpose was to secure the freedom of Kuwait. President Bush was then talking about a new world, a new future in which there would be much greater cooperation between nations large and small. It was the kind of speech that many people worldwide wanted to hear from an American President. That speech and its purposes and commitment was to be cut short.

America herself, has changed in substantial ways. There has been continual change in the strategic context in which we must work out our own future.

After the break-up of the Soviet Union, the United States was supreme, militarily and economically.

It was Morton Abramowitz from the Carnegie Endowment of International Peace, a former Ambassador of the United States, and one of the prime movers in establishing the International Crisis Group, who wrote "*How American exceptionalism dooms US foreign policy*"². Nothing has altered since then. Even President Obama has embraced those ideas of exceptionalism saying "*I believe America is exceptional*"³. A nation better than any other, motivated to do good and what America does is right, because America does it. The idea of American exceptionalism, which has always been present in the United States, has gone far beyond all comprehension in the years of America's absolute supremacy. It has created a different nation, a different society. Such ideas influence American foreign policy in ways that make it much more difficult to achieve a secure and safe path in the future.

The Australian Defence Issues Paper suggests we have shared values with the United States, however, these American views of herself have no part in Australia's values system. They represent an important point of difference between the United States and Australia. It affects the United States'

¹ President George HW Bush, [Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress](#), 6 March 1991.

² Abramowitz, '[How American exceptionalism dooms US foreign policy](#)'. The National Interest, October 2012.

³ President Obama's speech at the U.N. General Assembly, September 2013

strategic thinking and policies and drives America in directions, which in past times, has not been in Australia's interest. This important point of differentiation, which affects strategic policy in particular, will remain a point of major difference in our value system.

The US, Russian and the Ukraine – past mistakes, present

Our alliance with the United States made sense in the Cold War years. The Soviet Union was regarded as a global communist threat. There were communist insurgencies, not only in countries such as Hungary and Czechoslovakia, but in our own region. In Malaysia, in Thailand, in Indonesia, and as we believed at the time, in Vietnam. Australia, with limited resources, was correct in wanting a close association with a major power in these circumstances.

Ending the communist threat was only one consequence of the breakup of the Soviet Union. A greater consequence perhaps, was the absolute supremacy of the United States as a military and economic power. Before that time, both superpowers acted as a restraint on the other. Neither wanted a nuclear war and at the end of the day, both were concerned to avoid the kind of provocation that would inevitably lead to war. After 1990/91, the United States was under no such restraint. Russia was down, Russia was out of the count, so far as global influence was concerned.

After the break-up of the Soviet Union, it was a time for generosity. For once again recalling the spirit of the Marshall Plan and the post-World War II enlightenment, it was a time for magnanimity, it was not a time to recall the spirit of Versailles to exact vengeance on a fallen foe. Unfortunately, Europe and the United States chose the wrong path. Many ways could have been found to secure the independence of states freed from Soviet domination, at that time. NATO and the United States chose what turned out to be the most dangerous and provocative mechanism to achieve this security, and worked to include much of Eastern Europe within the confines of NATO itself. This was ignoring history, and past strategic relationships.

There were many who opposed the movement of NATO eastwards. President Gorbachev had been particularly concerned and indeed, believed he had a deal with Secretary of State, James Baker, for NATO not to move east. Today, Russia believes that that "agreement" was broken as NATO marched eastward.

Russia's acceptance of the reunification of Germany was supposed to be the quid quo pro for NATO not moving into the old eastern bloc states.

The point of all of this for Australia is that, the United States exhibited a marked lack of historic understanding and an incapacity to exercise effective diplomacy and make choices that would provide for peace in the longer term. There should have been attempts to make sure that Russia would be a collaborative and cooperative partner. Commentators⁴ in the United States have said that the West must take significant responsibility for more recent developments in the Ukraine, all based in that one major and tragically mistaken strategic decision, to move NATO east. It is the United States that must recognise the impact of its decisions in the difficulties that have occurred since.

Through this year we have seen turbulence in the Ukraine, the annexation of the Crimea, and actions that have soured Western relations with Russia even further. There has been no understanding of the historic circumstances, no attempt to act in ways that might increase trust. This has been a continuation of Cold War mentality with dramatic and unfortunate results.

President Putin and Russia have been roundly condemned for the annexation of the Crimea, but if Russia had not done so and if the United States and NATO are ultimately successful in getting the Ukraine to join NATO, Russia may well have saved the West a far larger problem. No Russian President would give up the military facilities in the Crimea. If the Crimea, as part of the Ukraine became part of NATO, NATO would require those facilities must be removed. This is a demand that Russia could never accept. So Russian actions in relation to the Crimea, as Chancellor Helmut Schmidt has said, should have been understandable and not deserving of the absolute and thoughtless criticism which it has attracted.

Instead of trying to attract the Ukraine and indeed, in earlier times, Georgia to join NATO, the United States should have been asking itself what is necessary if the Ukraine is to become one country, cohesively and sensibly governed. Clearly, both the pro-Western and pro-Russian factions in the Ukraine would need to learn the art of compromise, to know that neither can have it all. If they wanted their young country, only 23 years old, to

⁴Henry Kissinger, [To settle the Ukraine crisis, start at the end](#), The Washington Post, 5 March 2014
John Mearsheimer, [Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault](#), *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2014,
and his [Getting Ukraine wrong](#), *International New York Times*, 13 March 2014.

become a cohesive, peaceful land, then the art of compromise would have to be practiced by both sides. This could have been possible if the West and Russia had both taken the same view.

As Victoria Nuland, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs at the United States Department of State, stated⁵, America has already spent billions trying to get Ukraine to join NATO. It is alleged that the United States had been directly involved in the disturbances which overthrew President Viktor Yanukovich, who, even if thuggish and corrupt, had been put into office by a legitimate election.

It is too early to predict how events in the Ukraine may ultimately work out. The shooting down of the Malaysian aircraft again focused worldwide attention on the Ukraine. Unfortunately, much of the West handled this issue in a way which would have added to tension between the West and Russia.

Events in Eastern Europe centring on the Ukraine represent a major strategic problem and have heightened present difficulties between the West and Russia, with potentially very serious consequences.

The current situation again, represents a failure of United States diplomacy, a failure to understand historic perspectives and to make decisions which could so easily have led to a more secure outcome.

Middle East

The first Gulf War, designed to secure the freedom of Kuwait was a major international success. As President George HW Bush pointed out in his speech to Congress on 6 March 1991, 31 nations were involved. For the first time, Jews and Arabs were fighting alongside in a common cause, 31 nations with troops on the ground for one purpose. At the time, there are many who claimed that President Bush should have marched on to Bagdad to get rid of Saddam Hussein. He did not because he had an understanding of wider international events. He knew the importance of history and culture. It would have been easy to get rid of Saddam Hussein, but President Bush understood that he did not have the capacity to establish a cohesive government and to prevent sectarian bitteresses and hatreds arising. As a consequence of the second Iraq War, we now know that

⁵[Ukraine crisis: Transcript of leaked Nuland-Pyatt call](#), BBC News, 7 February 2014.

President George HW Bush was totally correct in that judgement. These events highlight the wisdom of the first decision and the disaster that has occurred since.

The first Gulf War was the last American success in the Middle East. With turmoil in Libya and Yemen, difficulties in Turkey and Egypt over the last 12 months, and continuing problems in Iraq and Syria, the whole region was more at risk than ever.

America has committed to a new air war in Iraq and Syria. President Obama must know that any kind of victory over Islamic State cannot be achieved without effective ground forces. To commit to an air war without ground forces being in place, or in sight, is an act of strategic folly. It again underlines the fact that we are far too close to the United States.

We know what is said about Iraq. We are told that the new government will overcome the divisions between Sunni and Shia, training from the United States and Australia will strengthen the Iraqi army and they will be able to stand up to Islamic State. It may be a bold statement when some Sunnis fear the Shia militia more than they fear Islamic State. There is no sign yet that the new Iraqi government is able to build a cohesive Iraq. If it cannot, all the air power in the world will not be successful in the war against Islamic State.

In Syria, the situation is even more alarming.

The United States, and for that matter Australia, have been too ready to rush in and assume the people fighting a brutal dictator are necessarily going to be better, to have higher ideals and sense of values than the person they are fighting against. In relation to the rebels in Syria who have morphed into Islamic State, those assumptions were certainly wrong. The assumption that the so called "good" rebels can prove to be an effective force, is also most likely to be proved false.

So, now in the Middle East, America, Australia, Britain and others have embarked on this new war. We have been told it will take many years, but without troops on the ground, which I agree should not be ours or American, the chances of a peaceful outcome or a defeat of Islamic State, are slight.

We have followed America into a war where the United States has acted without marshalling the necessary forces, the necessary coalition, and the

necessary assets to achieve a military and strategic victory. The reality is, at this stage, that there is no achievable and defined 'end point' – no real characterisation of what success will look like.

Radical groups have emerged, designed to end Western influence throughout the region. Does this mean that such groups represent an existential threat to people further afield?

So often as we have learnt more, and tragically often in retrospect, we have found our basic assumptions were wrong. What we do know is that the Middle East is now more dangerously poised than at any time in the post-war years.

In Afghanistan, while most NATO forces are withdrawing, 12,000 American troops are going to remain. We are likely to see increased attacks by the Taliban, who do not appear to have been particularly weakened by the long years of warfare. The way in which war has been conducted through South Asia, especially the use of drones and the consequences of drone killings, where a significant numbers of civilians have been killed, again, provides the extremists with a potent recruiting tool.

Events in the Middle East between Israel and Palestine, and also in Afghanistan, again represent a failure of United States diplomacy and a reduction in the United States influence worldwide. This has so often occurred because the United States and indeed, the West generally, interpret events through their own eyes without taking into account historic circumstances.

Pacific and Asia

There have also been significant strategic changes much closer to Australia, in the Pacific and throughout East and South East Asia. Here also, we have increasing tension. Western commentators tend to say that the rise of China, her growing military power is at the centre of that tension. Unfortunately, Chinese and Asian perceptions of what is happening are often different from American or Australian interpretation of events.

The United States has sought to counter what the United States regard as growing Chinese assertiveness in the East and South China Seas and also China's military build-up. It is worth putting these matters into a broader context. Chinese military expenditure is 11% of the world's total and

America's is 37%⁶. There are vast differences in the circumstances of the two countries. America has no military problems on her borders, but claims to have worldwide responsibility and a need to exercise force anywhere in the globe. China has traditionally been, and continues to be, more concerned with her own region. She does have a number of unstable situations on her borders, problems between India and Pakistan, difficulties with Iran and Iraq, to say nothing of an unpredictable North Korea. These factors alone give China a reason for a significant military force, a reason that the United States does not have.

But similar with the Ukraine, relationships with China are also a function of history. The lack of respect, the unequal treaties forced upon China at the time of the Boxer Rebellion are distant in our memory, but would all be relevant to the way China deals with issues at the present time. Because of Chinese withdrawal then and in the years after World War II, where much of China had been ravaged and brutalised by Japanese imperial forces, China has been reticent, not participating as much in international events, as today's China would expect to do.

From China's perspective, a number of events would be regarded as provocative. First the United States handing the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands back to Japan in 1971 occurred at a time when Chinese American relationships hardly existed. There was little thought of the fact that Japan had taken those islands from China in 1895, it has turned out to have been a provocative decision. It was an event that would have been ignored at the time, as China had no means then of asserting herself.

More recently, Secretary of State, Panetta's attempt to get Cam Ranh Bay reopened as a United States naval base, would be seen by the Chinese as provocative. This was something the Vietnamese had the good sense to reject, on the grounds that Cam Ranh Bay was open to the navies of many nations who may wish to use it. It would not become a base for the United States or any other country.

China has welcomed the strategic and economic dialogues conducted by the United States, but at the same time asks, which policy are they to believe because America has two policies; one of consultation and discussion and perhaps collaboration, and one of rearmament, of encirclement or containment. Although these are words the United States

⁶ ['Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2013'](#), *SIPRI Fact Sheet*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, April 2014.

does not use, many others, including Goh Chok Tong⁷, do. Which America is going to win out? The one that wishes to talk, or the one that relies on a military solution?

Many have written about the possibility of war between China and the United States.⁸ If left to the two great powers, war could probably be avoided, but with Japan in the equation, it is a different matter. Japan has become more assertive. Far more nationalistic, if you like, with a new growing militarism. Already possessing very powerful military forces, and with a capacity to develop in quite short compass, effective and long-range nuclear weapons.

Japan claims there is no dispute over those East China Sea Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. However, United States recently extended her defence guarantee for Japan to those islands, thus effectively siding with Japan on that particular dispute.⁹ That act was a major strategic mistake by the United States that will encourage Japan to be increasingly assertive. That is perhaps the most likely point of conflict.

If shooting starts between China and Japan it is not possible to say with any certainty that calmer heads will prevail and serious dangers will be averted. Such a dispute could easily lead to a long drawn-out war, which others have also written that the United States may well not win.¹⁰ If over many, many years the United States could not win in Vietnam, despite the resources thrown into that particular war, how could the United States possibly win in a contest with China? If Australia were involved in such a contest, and in today's world we could, thus, we would become a defeated ally of a defeated superpower. We cannot retreat to the Western hemisphere, America's homebase. Such an outcome would place Australia at great risk without a friend in our entire region.

⁷ Goh Chok Tong, 'Present state of the world', Tianjin, China, May 2012

⁸ White, 'Caught in a bind that threatens an Asian war nobody wants' SMH 26 December 2012
<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-opinion/caught-in-a-bind-that-threatens-an-asian-war-nobody-wants-20121225-2bv38.html>

⁹ Joint Press Conference with President Obama and Prime Minister Abe, Tokyo, 24 April 2014
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/04/24/joint-press-conference-president-obama-and-prime-minister-abe-japan>

¹⁰ This idea and the potential conflict scenarios between China and the United States are discussed in depth in White, The China Choice.

Australia

After 1990, Australia could have, but did not, exhibit a greater degree of strategic independence. When the Soviet Union disintegrated, we still had the capacity to make our own decisions about peace and war. We did not have to follow America. We were not committed purely because America was committed. In other words, up to that point, we had maintained the integrity of Australia as a sovereign nation, despite our close relationship with the United States. Up to that time, facilities on the Australian mainland did not, and could not, commit Australia to follow America into a war. These developments have occurred in the years since the break-up of the Soviet Union.

Through a whole series of steps since 1990, we have become more tightly enmeshed in American strategic and military affairs more than ever before. This has been achieved by close collaboration between our armed services, by collaboration between the Defence department and Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister's department and America, with agreement of both major political parties. Major issues were never put to the Australia public. It was just assumed that these steps would be good for Australia. There was never a debate, a discussion, it was never an issue before an election, it was never an issue in the Parliament.

The idea of interoperability of our armed services is something that has been pushed very hard by the United States. It has influenced many decisions relating to military operations, and the kind of equipment that we buy. It has in part influenced the appointment of Major General Burr as Deputy Commander of the US Army Pacific, in charge of 60,000 American troops, and the part-time deployment of a frigate as part of USS George Washington's escort. It is also relevant to our dependence on the United States satellites for communications.

There are however, two factors which tie us more closely than any of these events to the United States military machine and to the United States strategic objectives. The first is the US military base in Darwin and the second is Pine Gap.

If the United States wishes to use the air-ground taskforce from Darwin to attack some target, to use it in support of their defence commitment to Japan for example, they will not ask an Australia Prime Minister first, they will do it and Australia will be told about it. There is nothing new or unique in that, it is the way a great power behaves. But the consequence or

implications of that is that we can hardly say we are not complicit in the actions of that taskforce when it has taken off from Australian soil.

More important still, are the changed purposes and operations of Pine Gap. This used to be a largely defensive facility. It was more than anything else, an information gathering operation of significant importance.

Changes in communications and weapons technology, and their application to a great variety of United States weapons systems, from drones to longer-range missiles, has altered the character of Pine Gap. Information from Pine Gap is also used for missile defence, which China regards as vitiating its nuclear deterrent force, and targeting a range of modern offensive missiles. This would give Pine Gap a new and urgent relevance if a conflict between China and Japan involving the United States developed into serious conflict. It is Pine Gap, which above all, makes it impossible for Australia to say, Australia is not involved.

Thus, step by step, discreetly even secretly, successive Australian governments have allowed a situation to develop, in which if America goes to war in the Western Pacific, we have no option but to go to war as a direct consequence. If Australia sought to stand aside, we would not be believed. We have never before been in such a situation. This situation is not compatible with Australian integrity and with Australian sovereignty. The Australian public generally is unaware that successive governments have allowed this situation to develop. Australians do not realise that America's capacity to declare war and include us, is far greater than the power Britain had over the Dominions. The marked point of differentiation with earlier times, is that because of the offensive Marine Air Ground Taskforce in Darwin and because of the changed offensive purposes of Pine Gap, an Australia that sought to stay out of the war, would not be believed by other countries of our region.

No foreign power should have that control over Australia and certainly not a United States whose values are different, whose strategic policy decisions have been shown to be ill-balanced and dangerous.

Australians are unaware that the wars, in which we have followed America, were outside the terms of the ANZUS Treaty. Our commitment to the United States ties us to their values system and denies us the opportunity to decide our own future.

Conclusion

The strategic review should recommend that Australia re-establish the strategic independence it has lost in recent years. The United States now has greater power over Australia's future, than Britain ever had, even at the height of her power. Australia must deny any other country the capacity to take us to war simply because they go to war.

Establishing strategic independence obviously involves significant Implications.

- 1 The taskforce in Darwin would need to be moved to some other location outside Australia. This should be possible to accomplish in a relatively short timeframe. The facility at Pine Gap would need to be closed as we cannot control how America uses the intelligence it gathers from that site. Because it is a complex facility, we should give America time to do this, maybe 4 or 5 years. However, Australians working at the base should be withdrawn at the end of 6 months. This would clearly result in implications for our shared intelligence arrangements, especially with Britain and America. When New Zealand left ANZUS, they were not cut out of the 5-powers intelligence operation. However, a negotiated outcome should be possible.
- 2 We may well find access to American military equipment is diminished. This is not necessarily a bad thing. We have sometimes bought American equipment because it aided strategic cooperation even when it was not the best equipment. There are a number of countries that are providers of quality military hardware.
- 3 Our diplomatic facilities throughout East and South East Asia would need to be reinforced to prepare for more active diplomacy in our own part of the world. We would also need to reinforce our support for United Nations agencies and work more effectively both bilaterally and through the United Nations, with other middle ranking and like-minded powers. Such approaches would add to stability throughout our region and over time greatly increase our capacity to help mediate difficulties between states.
- 4 Of course this would involve greater cost. Possibly 3% of GNP. We have had defence on the cheap, hiding under the American machine, but at too great a cost to Australian nationality and respect. At the end of the day, we need to ask ourselves what is

Australia's independence, Australia's integrity, worth to
Australians.

The steps recommended here are necessary if Australia is to deny any
other power the capacity to decide whether we stay at peace or go to war.
They are necessary to recapture our sovereignty.

4729 words (without footnotes)