

# **“WOULD WE FOLLOW AMERICA INTO A FOURTH WAR?”**

**CRANLANA ALUMNI SERIES  
TOORAK  
24 SEPTEMBER 2014**

I am honoured to be asked to speak as part of the Cranlana Alumni Series.

Foreign policy needs to be looked at in the context of the times. From the Foundation of Australia to Federation, it was natural that we would rely on Britain for defence and foreign policy

By 1931, pressures from Canada, South Africa and the Republic of Ireland in particular, for greater freedom within the empire, were great. The Statute of Westminster was passed in 1931. Those three dominions immediately ratified, Australia did not. We maintained the policy of strategic dependence on Britain past it's used by date. The Statute of Westminster was not ratified in Australia until 1942. There had been a grand bargain with the United Kingdom. We would supply men, money, resources to help Britain fight Britain's wars and in return, in theory, they guaranteed the defence of Australia. When we needed it, no fault of Britain, but they could not help.

After World War II, the rivalry between the Soviet Union, the United States and the free world soon began. There had been communist insurgencies in our own part of the world. Australia again, wanted the protection of a major power. It was Percy Spender who negotiated and ultimately achieved ANZUS, it was less than he wanted, a commitment to consult and maybe defend. It was only achievable because Spender had made it clear that we would not sign the peace treaty with Japan, if we did not have some formal arrangements with the United States.

After 1990-91 matters changed, the strategic context changed. When there were 2 superpowers, both were, to an extent, restrained by the other. I know there were serious moments but neither wanted a nuclear war, neither wanted to press the other too hard. Once the United States became supreme, the only superpower, greater military forces and a stronger economy than any other nation, other changes began to unfold.

American exceptionalism had always been present in the United States. The idea is even embraced and supported by President Obama. A nation like no other, better than any other. What America does is right, because America does it.

Rules are for other countries. Together with the policies of the neo- conservatives, the political face of the United States had changed. Many believed that the United States would only be truly secure, if the whole world was a democracy.

America's duty was to achieve that, if possible by persuasion, but if necessary by force of arms. This philosophy offers the best explanation for the second Iraq war. This has contributed to the loss of America's prestige in the Middle East and unleashed sectarian forces throughout the region.

Nobody would have followed America into a war on that basis, and so, the idea of weapons of mass destruction was adopted. It was based on what many people at the time, knew to be a lie. Intelligence was cherry picked on Rumsfeld's direction, by Feith in the Pentagon, to support a policy already determined.

Events in the Middle East have not gone well for the United States, or for peace, or for that matter, for any of the inhabitants in the region.

The strategic context has continued to change. While there has been a marked deterioration over the Middle East, events in Eastern Europe are also fraught with danger.

America has also been at the centre of those eastern European problems. While western media and western leaders have continually and obsessively blamed President Putin for everything that has occurred, the origin of the problem goes back to NATO's move east, and to what President Gorbachev and Russia certainly believed was a commitment under the Bush Administration, not to do so.

It was then a time for magnanimity. By moving NATO east, it was certainly sending a hostile message to Russia. America has spent billions, according to Victoria Nuland, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, trying to persuade Ukraine to join NATO. Prof John Mearsheimer, from Chicago University, and others have written extensively on these aspects in eastern Europe.

Now the United States has turned their attention to the Western Pacific. There are no real signs that her diplomatic skills will be better demonstrated in this region than they were in the Middle East and eastern Europe.

There are many who support the military build-up, but I would argue, as has Goh Chok Tong, that it is dangerous, ill-conceived and cannot succeed. America already had significant forces throughout the region. While some

countries might welcome an addition to their forces, in the longer term, as they contribute to increased tension between China and the United States, they will come to realise that the military build-up is not adding to security but detracting from it.

Others have written that a conflict at some time between China and Japan is possible. Indeed, at one point Hugh White suggested it could have occurred as early as last year. I agree that that is the most likely flash point.

Japan's present government is strongly nationalist. Japan already has armed forces more significant than any European country and could develop nuclear weapons virtually in a matter of weeks. President Obama has already made mistakes in his relationship with Japan. Only the other day, he reaffirmed the absolute commitment to defend Japan, including those islands in the East China Sea. He should have extracted a commitment from Japan that they would recognise that there is, indeed, a dispute and also gain a commitment that Japan would negotiate either directly with China or through agreed international adjudication. That opportunity has passed by and so the commitment tied America firmly to Japan. Before, the President had claimed to be neutral over the questions of ownership of the islands.

There are many who believe that the Chinese claim is, in fact, stronger. The unequal treaties imposed by European powers, by Japan and by America, before and around the time of the Boxer Rebellion will, in the Chinese view, all be redressed.

It is claimed that the military build-up is necessary because of China's growing economy. American spokesmen come through Australia and travel around the region emphasising American friendship with every country from Japan, to Australia, to India, but warning against China. It is not wise diplomacy to imply an enemy in such a fashion, especially when people are blind to any understanding or viewpoint but their own.

I have been told by Americans that China is a threat to freedom of the seas in the East and South China Seas. It is an absurd claim. Two-thirds of their own trade goes through those seas, it's a two way business, it's a two way benefit to China and America and the countries between. Nobody would want to upset that trade.

It is extraordinarily bad judgement to suggest that America needs the military build up to protect commercial and trade

interests. The commercial and trade interests do not need military support to be progressed into today's world.

ASEAN countries have demonstrated that if left to themselves, they can form a useful and effective association. They have overcome past enmities and now ASEAN contributes greatly to stability in the region. ASEAN is also negotiating with China for a code of conduct within the South China Sea. America has had no part in this and America's interference now would make agreement harder to achieve.

The United States would not regard USS Washington patrolling the East and South China Seas, stationed in a Japanese harbour, as being provocative, sailing almost within sight of the Chinese mainland. Imagine the American reaction if the Chinese had a carrier and copied that action off the East Coast of the United States. It would then be regarded as a great provocation.

Hugh White has suggested that America should share power with China over the Pacific, that we should seek to persuade America to do so. We have no special relationship with America that would give us any particular influence. There are many countries in a similar position.

The evidence available suggests that America wishes to remain supreme, number one, unchallenged, through this century. Sometimes, great powers during a period of relative decline, can be more dangerous than rising powers.

The last part of my book discusses Australia's position. I have made it clear that strategic dependence was appropriate during the Cold War and indeed, in earlier times. I had believed after the fall of the Soviet Union that we could become more independent, have our own voice in international affairs. I have had more than one senior leader throughout Asia say to me "*of course we will talk to Australia, but we don't need Australia to give us American views*".

Instead of exercising a degree of strategic independence after 1991, we have over the last 25 years become more closely enmeshed in the American military machine than ever before.

Much of this has happened without any reference to Australia, without Australians being asked, without Australians being advised. We were told that troops were going to be established in Darwin. We were told that this was a training operation so that American and Australian

forces could get to know each other, work better together. That is a cover story and it is not true.

Outside Australia, American political and defence leaders point to it as a significant part of the pivot to the Western Pacific. It is a taskforce that could exercise significant power anywhere throughout the Western Pacific region. Fast naval units have been assigned to enable it to fulfil its purpose, and aircraft are flying in and out of Tindal Base in Darwin on a continuing basis.

This taskforce can be used by the United States at their discretion, without any reference to Australia.

In addition to that, Australians have been deceived over many years about the current purposes of Pine Gap. It was originally a defensive operation, collecting information of vital importance, if the Soviet Union sought to use its missile system against the United States. The character of Pine Gap has changed. It is now, not only defensive in nature, but more important to America, is its offensive capacity. Its capacity with other facilities to pinpoint potential enemy targets and to use that information, almost in real time, to send modern weapon systems right to the target. It is

relevant to drone killings, and to other aspects of America's offensive capacity in the Western Pacific.

If the anti-ballistic missile system ever becomes fully operative, Pine Gap will also be playing an integral part in that. If such a system is ever fully effective, China will be concerned that her 220 missiles do not offer a reasonable deterrent, because the purpose of an anti-ballistic missile system is to shoot down intercontinental missiles with another missile.

This has been made possible by the transformation in advanced communications technology, which the United States has used with remarkable skill, to develop a new series of weapons systems.

While these two facilities tie us most heavily to the United States, the new uses of North West Cape designed to achieve the mastery of space, run the serious risk of contravening the provisions of the *1967 Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies*, designed to make sure that space was not used for military purposes.

Australians have not been informed, they have not been asked about any of these developments. We have also not been informed of other changes that have taken place. The United States Army Secretary announced some time ago, that Major General Burr of the Australian Defence Force, is Deputy Commander of the US Army Pacific, which oversees more than 60,000 American troops in the Western Pacific. An Australian frigate was on station with the USS Washington for a period last year, and I understand, again this year.

When USS Washington takes up an provocative stance against China, when our frigate is part of her escort, we are a part of that action hostile to China. Now we learn, if The Australian is correct, I have no reason to doubt the report, that Australia and the United States are planning to allow the United States to aim and fire missiles from Australian ships. We need to be clear about this. If America has the capacity to achieve that, they will not be asking us first. They will expect us to comply with their wishes.

Very few people would have also understood that in this last year, for the first time, Australian soldiers operated in cooperation with Americans and South Koreans in joint

exercises, which could only ultimately be aimed at North Korea.

Some things need to be kept discreet, but achieving a degree of interoperability with the United States, which makes it very difficult for our forces to act alone, it is not in our interest. As they stand now, if American forces are used, in many cases ours must be. Our government's capacity to make decisions concerning peace and war is greatly diminished. Indeed, if forces from Darwin are used, with Pine Gap integral to America's defensive and offensive capacity, Australia would not be believed if we said we were not involved. What has happened is a betrayal of Australia sovereignty.

Canada had the good sense not to send forces to Vietnam and the good sense not to send forces to Iraq. We were involved in both wars. Neither was part of ANZUS.

Japan has reinterpreted its constitution without any referendum, which on all the polls, would have been defeated. Its forces can now be used in a similar fashion to any other country.

China will not give up claims to the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. The Americans occupied those islands for several years and only returned them to Japan in 1971. In April 2014, President Obama extended her promise of nuclear defence of Japan, to cover those islands. A major strategic mistake.

China's aircraft at times, fly close to those islands, her ships sail close to the islands. If Japan gets impatient, or decides the way to stop it is to give China a blood nose, if Prime Minister Abe then says to his airman, *shoot down a couple of Chinese aircraft, or sink a couple of Chinese ships*, what will China do? Will it dispatch forces, paratroopers to take possession of those islands?

This is not an impossible scenario, it is not make believe. Other people have written that a contest between China and Japan is the most likely cause of a possible war in the Western Pacific. If shooting once starts, nobody can tell where it may end.

The United States wishes to demonstrate with strength and with force, that a commitment to Japan is real. She uses that taskforce in Darwin to recapture those islands. They take off from Australian soil, their home base. We cannot say we are not involved. We are not complicit. When American

missiles are using information gleaned from Pine Gap, to pinpoint targets, whether it be an individual or some more important facility, we cannot say we are not involved.

Bob Carr shares some of my concerns about the closeness of our relationship with America, as does Hugh White, but neither carry it through to its clear conclusion. If America goes to war, if an Australian Prime Minister standing in the parliament says that we are going to pass this one by, we are not going to be involved, he would not be believed. Quite apart from the imbedding of forces, the use of Pine Gap and Darwin makes such a claim, impossible. Pine Gap, in any such conflict, would now be high on the target list of such a conflict became a continuing war between China and the United States and Japan.

You might say, well America will defend us and it won't matter too much. We won't have to put out too great an effort and America will win. Hugh White has written that America may not win. I believe America would not win. The technological gap between China and the United States is less than the technological gap between Vietnam and the United States during the Vietnamese war and America could not win against Vietnam.

While America would not put an army on the mainland of Asia ever again, she could certainly find ways of inflicting significant damage on China. China fighting for China, for their own land, would have an endurance and a capacity to experience hardship, which the United States could never match. It might take 10-12 years, which would have been not only 10-12 years of conflict with all its terrible costs, but also with the virtual destruction of the American economy and the hardship placed upon Americans, which they have never, in all their history, experienced.

The price of defeat would be withdrawal of American military bases from the Western Pacific, including from Australia. America could retire to the western hemisphere and slowly trade in commerce, financial relationships would be rebuilt. Civil relations would slowly resume, but after such a conflict, we would be in the uncomfortable position of being the defeated ally of a defeated superpower, without a friend in the entire region. It is also the logical conclusion of current policies and of current military relationships with the United States.

For these reasons therefore, continuing the present relationship with the United States does not take Australia out of danger but puts us into much greater danger than we

would ever be, as an independent nation, conducting out own affairs in relationships with other middle ranking powers, in our own region and further afield.

Of course there is a risk. The whole future carries risks, especially in terms of strategic policy. The question our policy makers need to ask themselves, which policy is most likely to secure Australia's future. Which policy carries the least risk for us? Continuing our current policies is the riskiest policy we could possible pursue.

There would clearly be difficulties in untangling our relationship with the United States, but a determined government could achieve it. Such a change on our part, might well do more to make America less assertive, less demanding. Then an accommodation with China could be more easily achievable. It also may cause America to exercise a more restrained policy on Japan, instead of encouraging Japan to expand her armaments and her provocative stance.

I know this challenges the political class. Politicians of both major parties, much of the defence department, and other members in the bureaucracy are all totally committed,

indeed, wedded to the present relationship with the United States.

We continued our strategic dependence upon Britain long past its used by date. We would ultimately have a very great price to pay if Australia continues to pursue policies that were relevant to a past age, but not to the present strategic context.

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