
US Marine Corps Battalion Deployment to Australia: Potential Strategic Implications

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During 2011, the United States and Australia agreed to the deployment of a US Marine Corps force to Darwin, Australia, to be rotated on a seasonal basis. This expeditionary force aspires to strengthen the interoperability between the US military and Australian Defence Force. It also is a tangible signal of the United States' commitment to a long-term military presence in the Western Pacific in light of its "Pivot to Asia" and a symbolic notice that Washington intends to contest potential attempts by China to gain hegemony over the South China Sea (SCS). This article examines how deployment of this force came about, reaction to it in Australia and the United States, and potential future geopolitical ramifications it could have for Australia, China, Southeast Asian countries, and the United States.

During a November 2011 visit to Australia then Prime Minister Julia Gillard (LAB-Lalor) and President Barack Obama announced that the United States would begin deploying 200-250 Marines in Darwin on a rotational basis starting the following year with the number of Marines eventually reaching 2,500. These forces will use existing Australian bases, be deployed in six-month rotations, conduct exercises and training with the Australian Defence Force (ADF), and be part of a Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF). This visit also saw Washington and Canberra agree to greater cooperation between the US Air Force and Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) through increased rotations of US aircraft through Northern Australia to enhance bilateral cooperation and combined training and exercises which can be seen as reflecting the Indo-Pacific region's increasing strategic importance to the United States.¹

Addressing Australia's Parliament on 17 November 2011, Obama stressed historic security ties between Australia and the United States, while also noting that the United States is and remains a Pacific Ocean nation. He also noted that the troop rotation would increase the US commitment to Asia-Pacific security and that Washington would not let its budget problems injure its commitment to freedom of navigation, projecting power, and deterring threats to peace. These historic security ties, covering military and

¹ The White House, 'Prime Minister Gillard and President Obama Announce Force Posture Initiatives', 16 November 2011, <www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/16/prime-minister-gillard-and-president-obama-announce-force-posture-init-0> [Accessed 22 July 2016]. Australian Representatives and Senators represent specific constituencies and states. These are mentioned the first time their names are mentioned in this work.

intelligence cooperation, have produced strategic successes for both countries and some controversy in certain sectors of Australian public opinion who have been concerned over possible Australian loss of sovereignty and international freedom of manoeuvre and concern that a future international crisis scenario may force Australia to choose between the United States and China.²

The MAGTF is designed for rapid force protection in combat situations and is capable of taking and holding strategic territory in anticipation of surging additional forces. Darwin's selection as the location for the MAGTF involves its proximity to the Straits of Malacca (which is the world's busiest shipping corridor carrying 80% of China's crude oil imports), it being outside most Chinese missile threat ranges, having low-traffic skies for aerial training, and sitting adjacent to a large and sparsely populated region open to live fire simulations. This arrangement benefits Australia by providing it with additional strategic assurance from the United States given China's increasing international assertiveness, facilitating improved access to US technology, enhancing ADF capabilities and interoperability with its most powerful ally, and enhancing commercial opportunities in defence, maintenance and support sectors. The United States benefits by being able to use the large geographical expanses of the Australian continent and surrounding waters for maintaining essential communications and intelligence gathering assets, enhancing its regional presence with augmented force deployment flexibility, and enhancing its capabilities through better training and exercising facilities while also increasing its engagement with the ADF. In addition, the United States benefits with strategic partners such as Australia assuming greater responsibility for their defences.³

The rotational deployment of this MAGTF is a small part of a larger US attempt to increase its military presence in the Asia-Pacific region stemming from a strategic rebalance to this region, which also has economic implications given the United States's concern with international freedom of

² See Australia Parliament, House of Representatives, *Hansard*, 17 November 2011, p. 12846, <parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;db=CHAMBER;id=chamber%2Fhansardr%2F15888e39-7a11-4ca2-9456-f088c9812ef0%2F0005;query=Id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansardr%2F15888e39-7a11-4ca2-9456-f088c9812ef0%2F0006%22> [Accessed 22 July 2016]; Desmond Ball, *Pine Gap: Australia and the US Geostationary Signals Intelligence Satellite Program* (Crow's Nest, NSW: Unwin Hyman, 1988); Jeffrey Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, 3rd ed. (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Eli Daniel Potts and Annette Potts, *Yanks Down Under: The American Impact on Australia, 1941-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); and Joseph Wheatley, 'Does Australia Face a "China Choice"?', *Australian Defense Force Journal*, no. 199 (March-April 2016), pp. 49-54, <www.adfjournal.adc.edu.au/UserFiles/issues/199%202016%20Mar_Apr.pdf> [Accessed 28 July 2016].

³ See Stuart Rolle and Tess Lea, 'Marine Deployment The Region's Wake-Up Call', *The Canberra Times*, 25 August 2016, p. B004; and Jack McCaffire and Chris Rahman, 'The U.S. Strategic Relationship With Australia', in Carnes Lord and Andrew S. Erickson (eds.), *Rebalancing U.S. Forces: Basing and Forward Presence in the Asia Pacific* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2014): p. 114.

navigation and Washington's increasing bilateral trade with regional countries. On 10 February 2015, then Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Jonathan Greenert told an Australian audience that the United States intended to increase the volume of the Navy's fleet in Asian-Pacific waters from 50-60% and include 60% of the US Air Force's overseas-based forces in this region. The increasing overall US maritime regional presence is reflected by the Darwin deployment and US trade with Asia has increased from US\$1.34 trillion in 2011 to US\$1.46 trillion in 2015 with total trade from January-December 2016 being US\$1.309.540 trillion.⁴

Subsequent years have seen these force deployments occur during the Northern Territory's (NT) six-month dry season (April-September) with the MAGTF including the following force structure for 2012-2016 (see Table 1).

Economic and Social Impacts of US Troop Rotation

Studies prepared in 2013 for Australia's Department of Defence by Deloitte Access Economics forecast potential economic and social impacts of the US troop rotation on Darwin and the NT. The economic impact study predicted the NT economy would receive \$5.6 million (US\$5.114 million) in 2014, that Australian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would increase by \$5.4 million (US\$4.931 million) and that these were conservative estimates based on individual Marines spending approximately \$7,000. Telephone polling of 500 NT residents saw 88% believing the Marines presence would produce economic benefits. This analysis also noted that equipment the Marines would bring to the NT includes vehicles and vehicle support equipment such as all-terrain vehicles, light armoured vehicles, heavy trucks, and weapons including small arms, mortars and towed cannons. Additional aircraft and aircraft support equipment which could be brought to Australia include rotary wing and tilt-rotor aircraft including CH-53 and MV-22 Osprey helicopters; and tankers or transport aircraft including the KC-130 Hercules and fighter jets such as the F/A-18. Maintenance and support for this equipment could be provided by the Marine Corps, industry, or a combination of these entities and that biosecurity and quarantine concerns could be lessened by leaving some equipment in Australia between rotations.⁵

⁴ See Tim Law, 'Rebalancing, What, Exactly?: Analysing the United States' Pacific Pivot', *Australian Defence Force Journal*, no. 198 (November/ December 2015), pp. 23-30, <www.adfjournal.adc.edu.au/UserFiles/issues/198%202015%20Nov_Dec.pdf> [Accessed 28 July 2016]; Nguyen Thi Thuy Hang, 'The U.S. Rebalance to the Asia-Pacific: An Assessment', *Asian Journal of Public Affairs*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2016), pp. 20-37, <[lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/ajpa_08_02.pdf](http://kyspp.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/ajpa_08_02.pdf)> [Accessed 28 July 2016]; and US Census Bureau, 'Foreign Trade: Trade in Goods With Asia', <www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c0016.html> [Accessed 23 January 2017].

⁵ Deloitte Access Economics, *Economic Impact of the Rotation of 1,100 US Marines and Associated Equipment in Northern Australia: Report for the Department of Defence* (Brindabella, ACT: Deloitte Access Economics, 10 April 2013): pp. i-3, <www.defence.gov.au/publications/docs/USMC1100economicassessment.pdf> [Accessed 28 July 2016].

Table 1: Marine Rotation Force Deployments in the Northern Territory

Year	Regiment	Approx. Rotation Size	Equipment	Key Activities
2012	2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, HI	200	No heavy equipment, vehicles, and aircraft	Bilateral training with Australian Defence Force (ADF)
2013	3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, HI	250	No heavy equipment, vehicles, and aircraft	Bilateral Training with ADF Exercise Koolendong Exercise Talisman Sabre Australian-Indonesian humanitarian assistance tabletop
2014	1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, Camp Pendleton, CA	1,150	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four CH-53E Super Stallion Helicopters • 150 vehicles • Support Equipment 	Bilateral Training with ADF Exercise Hamel Exercise Koolendong Exercise Southern Frontier
2015	1st Marine Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, Camp Pendleton, CA. Detachment Combat Logistics Battalion 1, Camp Pendleton.	1,150	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four CH-53E Super Stallion Helicopters • Support Equipment 	Bilateral Training with ADF Exercise Talisman Sabre Exercise Predator Walk Exercise Kowari Military Skills Competition
2016	1st Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, Camp Pendleton, CA. Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 367, MCAS Kaneohe Bay, HI. Detachment-Combat Logistics Battalion 1, Camp Pendleton, CA.	1,250 (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four Bell UH-1Y Venom helicopters • 100 vehicles • Support Equipment 	Bilateral Training with ADF Exercise Koolendong Exercise Kowari Exercise Hamel Exercise Southern Jackaroo

Source: Australia, Department of Defence, 'United States Marine Corps Initiative: Overview', (Canberra: Department of Defence, 2016), <defence.gov.au/usfpi/marines.asp> [Accessed 28 July 2016].

Projected social impacts of the US troop rotation included the Marines representing less than 1% of Darwin's population; only being present for six months; living on base; and being in the field for training and exercises for most of the six-month period. There was slight concern for negative impacts like sexual assault occurring, but that is limited to a 5% probability of one such assault occurring which was too small to concern the preponderance of

individuals consulted. Most phone survey respondents thought the MAGTF social impact would be limited except for 9% perceiving improved national security occurring; 8% expecting improvement in understanding and respecting the Indigenous community; and 9% expecting increased aircraft noise. Additional social impact factors are the Marines complying with Australian policy and existing practice concerning cluster munitions, depleted uranium, and nuclear forces; US military personnel in Australia being governed by a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) making these personnel subject to Australian law and US military law; this SOFA granting Australia exclusive jurisdiction for alleged offences against Australian laws but not US laws; exclusive US jurisdiction to US military authorities for alleged offences against US laws; and the 1963 SOFA and Defence (Visiting Forces) Act giving both countries a mechanism for determining which country has primary jurisdiction if an offence is punishable by Australian and US law.⁶

Australian Parliamentary Debate

The Marine Corps troop rotation agreement has received periodic reaction during Australian parliamentary debates though opposition to it within Australian governmental and parliamentary circles has been relatively limited. The rotation was initially agreed to by Gillard's Labor government and has been adhered to by the Coalition governments of Tony Abbott (LIB-Warringah) and Malcolm Turnbull (LIB-Wentworth). On 21 March 2012, Senator Scott Ludlam (Greens-Western Australia) asked Foreign Minister Bob Carr (LAB-New South Wales) what he could tell about the Marine Corps rotation which Ludlum described as the biggest operational addition to the US-Australian alliance since the 1980s. Carr replied that the response from Australia's regional neighbours had been muted or supportive noting that Indonesia's President thought such training exercises could be expanded to include other nations such as China. Carr also added that decisions about national security and foreign relations have been executive government

⁶ See Deloitte Access Economics, *Social Impact of Rotations of Up to 1,100 US Marines and Associated Equipment in Northern Australia: Report for the Department of Defence* (Brindabella, ACT: Deloitte Access Economics, 2013), pp. 1-3, 6, <www.defence.gov.au/publications/docs/USMC1100socialassessment.pdf> [Accessed 28 July 2016]; Australia, Federal Register of Legislation, Criminal Code Amendment (Cluster Munitions Prohibition Act) 2012, No. 114 (2012), (Canberra: Federal Register of Legislation, 2012): <www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2012A00114> [Accessed 28 July 2016]; Ibid., Nuclear Non-Proliferation (Safeguards) Act 1987, No. 8 (1987), <www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2016C00618> [Accessed 28 July 2016]; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Nuclear Legislation in OECD Countries: Regulatory and Institutional Framework for Nuclear Activities: Australia*, (Paris: OECD, 2007): <www.oecd-neo.org/law/legislation/australia.pdf> [Accessed 28 July 2016]; and Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Agreement with the Government of the United States of America Concerning the Status of United States Forces in Australia, and Protocol*, [1963] ATS 10, (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2012), <www.info.dfat.gov.au/Info/Treaties/Treaties.nsf/AllDocIDs/005D3E39D4BF9757CA256B59000DD46F> [Accessed 28 July 2016].

prerogatives since Federation, that there was no need to renegotiate the 1963 SOFA agreement, and that it is part of Australia's national interests to ensure its northern territory and northern approaches are secured against potential threats.⁷

During a 26 June 2013 debate in the House of Representatives, Defence Minister Stephen Smith (LAB-Perth) noted historic Australian-US security ties whose provenance dates back to World War Two. These ties involve jointly administered facilities including Pine Gap in the NT, Nurrangar at Woomera in South Australia, and the Northwest Cape in Western Australia. Smith commented that the 2010 Australian-US Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) in Melbourne saw both countries establish a joint force posture working group to examine opportunities for enhanced defence force cooperation which produced the 2011 Obama-Gillard Agreement leading to the April 2012 arrival of the first rotation of 200 marines to Darwin for a six-month deployment. Rep. Stuart Robert (LIB-Fadden) expressed the Coalition's support for existing and upcoming security cooperation with the United States noting the contributions Coalition Governments had made to enhancing these ties and criticising the Green Party for failing to realise that these security ties enable early warning intelligence facilitating arms control verification and stopping the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.⁸

2013 AUSMIN Agreement and 2014 Force Posture Agreement

Following the November 2013 AUSMIN between Australian and American Secretaries of State and Defence, a statement of principles was signed on 21 November 2013 clarifying the nature of the Marine Corps deployment which is commonly called the 'force posture initiative'. These principles included reiterating the continuing applicability of the 1963 SOFA to the legal status of US military personnel under this agreement; the bilateral relationship between these countries being based on full respect for national independence, self-reliance, and sovereignty; and making sure Australian-US security cooperation partnership benefits both countries and the region. Additional stipulations of these principles include ensuring force posture initiatives are conducted on fair and sustainable financial and non-financial contributions; shaping expansion of practical bilateral defence cooperation initiatives through force cooperation; developing such initiatives to ensure continued domestic and regional support; and affirming Canberra's and Washington's intention to pursue a legally binding agreement covering cost-

⁷ Australia, Parliament, Senate, *Hansard*, 21 March 2012, p. 2444.

⁸ Australia, Parliament, House of Representatives, *Hansard*, 26 June 2013, pp. H7071-80.

sharing and being able to use mutually determined facilities to produce expanded bilateral on force posture initiatives.⁹

On 12 August 2014 a proposed treaty was signed in Sydney by these two countries and called the Force Posture Agreement (FPA). Australia emphasised the necessity of this agreement by saying it supported its efforts to enhance its longstanding alliance with Washington and further its national interests in maintaining a strong US presence as a stabilising anchor in the Asia-Pacific. The agreement also affirmed the importance of maintaining interoperability with US forces optimising ADF skill levels through enhanced training opportunities. It also stressed that it gives Australia and the United States the chance to work with regional partners on common contingencies including humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. An accompanying National Interest Analysis of this agreement stressed:

Failure to bring the agreement into force could significantly complicate and delay the full implementation of the force posture initiatives in Australia, increasing legal and financial risks for both Australia and the United States. It could also undermine Australia's long-standing alliance with the United States, with potential ramifications for Australia's bilateral defence cooperation and national security policy. The force posture initiatives represent an important new element in our defence cooperation with the United States; failure to take appropriate steps to provide for their full implementation would likely be seen by the United States as a diminution in Australia's commitment to the alliance. It would also curtail opportunities for the ADF to maintain and enhance skills and interoperability with US Forces.¹⁰

Following its 2014 AUSMIN consultations, the FPA came into effect on 31 March 2015. The agreement gives US forces an Australian presence to perform activities including security operation exercises, joint and combined training exercises, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. It does not provide for permanent US military bases in Australia and US forces are hosted at existing ADF sites such as Robertson Barracks in Shoal Bay, NT, and RAAF Base Darwin, which are 18.1 kilometres apart (see Figure 1).¹¹

⁹ US Department of State, 'Statement of Principles Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of Australia', (Washington, DC: Department of State, 21 November 2013), pp. 1-2, <www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/11/217919.htm> [Accessed 29 July 2016].

¹⁰ Australia, Parliament, Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, *The Force Posture Agreement Between the Government of Australia, and the United States of America* (Canberra: Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, 2014), pp. 4-5, <www.aph.gov.au/~media/02%20Parliamentary%20Business/24%20Committees/244%20Joint%20Committees/JSCT/2014/26August2014/force_posture_text.pdf?la=en>; and *ibid.*, *National Interest Analysis 2014 ATNIA 19* (Canberra: Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, 2014), p. 3, <www.aph.gov.au/~media/02%20Parliamentary%20Business/24%20Committees/244%20Joint%20Committees/JSCT/2014/26August2014/force_posture_nia.pdf?la=en> [Both accessed 4 August 2016].

¹¹ Australia, Department of Defence, 'United States Force Posture Initiatives in Australia', Department of Defence, 2016, <defence.gov.au/usfpi/> [Accessed 29 July 2016]; and 'US

Figure 1: Robertson Barracks and RAAF Base Darwin



Source: Courtesy of Australian Department of Defence.

Department of State, Joint Communique AUSMIN 2014', US Department of State, 12 August 2014, pp. 1-3, <2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/230524.htm> [Accessed 29 July 2016].

2016 Australian Defence White Paper

On 25 February 2016 the Coalition government of Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Defence Minister Marise Payne (LIB-New South Wales) released a Defence White Paper emphasising the importance of the FPA and the area north of Australia in future Australian strategic planning. This document stressed increasing Canberra's alliance with Washington, seeking to maintain cooperative but cautious relationships with China given Beijing's assertiveness in the East and South China Seas, competing territorial claims and contention for potential natural resources in these waters, and the need for Australia to upgrade its military forces in the NT and Indo-Pacific regions to enhance Canberra's strategic and geopolitical interests including combating illegal immigration.¹²

US Government Responses

While US Government policymakers in Congress and elsewhere have expressed concern about uncertain resourcing for the US Pacific pivot, there has been general consensus that the Forces Posture Agreement is desirable for the United States' increasing economic and strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific region.¹³ A provision in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 National Defense Authorization Act noted that there was not a clear specific plan in the defence budget for the capacity to fund resources and equipment necessary to transport and manoeuvre US military forces as part of the FPA and pivot to the Pacific. This legislation required the Department of Defense to prepare a report to ensure that US forces in the Pacific, including the MAGTF deployment to Australia, are properly funded.¹⁴

On 26 April 2013, a House Armed Services Committee subcommittee held a hearing on the force readiness and posture of the US Navy and Marine Corps. Subcommittee Chair Rep. Robert Wittmann (R-VA), in a post-hearing question to Lt. General William Faulkner, the Marine Corps Deputy Commandant for Installations and Logistics, and Lt. General Richard Tryon, Marine Corps Deputy Commandant for Plans, Policies, and Operations, expressed concern that the Marine Corps not create a "hollow force" and that the United States had the ability to provide ready forces to combatant

¹² See Australia, Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper* (Canberra: Department of Defence, 2016), pp. 18, 42, 53, 57, 70-72, 77, 101-4; and Bert Chapman, 'Geopolitics of the 2016 Australian Defence White Paper and Its Predecessors', *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2017), pp. 17-67, <docs.lib.purdue.edu/lib_fsdocs/134/> [Accessed 29 July 2016].

¹³ See Peter Gadd, *Rebalance to the Pacific: Resourcing the Strategy* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, 2013), <www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a589241.pdf> [Accessed 29 July 2016]; US Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, *Resourcing the Pivot to Asia: East Asia and Pacific FY 2015 Budget Priorities* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2014), <purl.fdlp.gpo.gov/GPO/50835> [Accessed 29 July 2016].

¹⁴ *Congressional Record*, 158 (163) (18 December 2012), p. H7157, <www.govinfo.gov/app/content/pkg/CREC-2012-12-18/pdf/CREC-2012-12-18-pt1-PgH6869-5.pdf> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

commanders given maintenance, operational and training impacts due to budget sequestrations. Generals Faulkner and Tryon responded by stressing that the Marine Corps not create a “hollow force” and that the United States had the ability to provide ready forces to combatant commanders given maintenance, operational, and training impacts due to budget sequestrations. Generals Faulkner and Tryon responded by stressing that the Marine Corps balances force health and readiness across the pillars of high quality people, unit readiness, capability, and capacity to meet requirements, infrastructure sustainment and equipment modernisation. Acknowledging sequestration would adversely impact future readiness, they went on to contend that sufficient operations and maintenance funding is needed to train and engage rotational forces in Australia and elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific.¹⁵

Concern over the financial sustainability of the Marine Corps force posture realignment to Australia and other Asia-Pacific locales was also expressed in an 11 June 2013 report by Congress’s Government Accountability Office (GAO). This assessment noted that overall costs of US troop relocations in the Pacific, not including Australia, would be US\$12.1 billion; the absence of costs estimates for the Marines in Australia; that cost estimates for relocating the Marines to Australia, Hawaii, and the continental United States were developed using previous costing data for a Guam location; cost estimates for a rotational deployment of 2,500 Marines to Australia are not based on finalised plans or requirements due to the absence of Australian support for provided requirements; the Marines do not know what additional Australian infrastructure and support facilities they will require; and that it may be necessary to preposition equipment in Australia to lower transportation costs and cope with agriculture and quarantine inspection costs.¹⁶

The congressionally authorised National Defense Panel (NDP) on the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review report stressed the importance of the United States maintaining close ties with security partners such as Australia while urging these countries to increase their defence spending. This panel also supported exploring the expanded use of regional facilities in Australia and elsewhere while also emphasising the necessity of the United States improving command and control of coalition forces in a technologically

¹⁵ US Congress, House Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Readiness, *The Readiness Posture of the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Marine Corps* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2013); pp. 86-87, <www.govinfo.gov/app/content/pkg/CHRG-113hrg80770/pdf/CHRG-113hrg80770.pdf> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

¹⁶ US Government Accountability Office, *Defense Management: More Reliable Cost Estimates and Further Planning Needed to Inform Marine Corps Realignment Initiatives in the Pacific* (Washington, DC: GAO, 2013), pp. 20-21, 27, 36, <www.gao.gov/assets/660/655142.pdf> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

contested environment where partnering forces could be acutely vulnerable to electronic attack.¹⁷

During a 26 February 2016 House Appropriations Committee Subcommittee hearing, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Energy, Installations, and the Environment Dennis McGinn, responding to a question from Rep. Charles Dent (R-PA) on the status of force realignment negotiations with Australia, the Philippines and Singapore, asserted that ongoing DOD negotiations with Canberra and Manila would modernise these alliances while developing more geographically distributed, operationally resilient and politically sustainable regional defence postures. He also noted the successful completion of four Marine rotations in Australia, with the fifth scheduled to begin that month.¹⁸

On 4 May 2016, the House Armed Services Committee issued its report on the proposed Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 defence budget. This document noted its ongoing support for the Marine Rotational Force in Darwin contending it helped increase military readiness and enhanced partnerships with the ADF and other regional militaries. However, this committee complained that the Marine Corps still had not started planning or designing for known infrastructure requirements to support the 2,500 Marines as required by the United States' Future Years Defense Program.

The committee observed that that the Marines had identified a requirement for an aircraft parking apron at RAAF Darwin and requested authorisation for building this facility in its FY 2017 budget request. It also urged the Marines to work with the US Air Force on a collaborative design effort to meet aircraft parking requirements while also directing the Secretary of the Navy to brief their committee by 1 February 2017 on the status of development, planning, programming and infrastructure requirements to support 2,500 marines and their equipment in Darwin and Northern Australia including cost, scope and timeline along with relevant cost-sharing arrangements by the Australian Government. However, these Australia-related provisions were not in the House or Senate Appropriations Committee versions of the 2017 defence appropriations legislation and their status was uncertain as of early August 2016.¹⁹

¹⁷ The National Defense Panel of the Quadrennial Defense Review, *Ensuring a Strong U.S. Defense for the Future* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace, 2014), pp. 12, 40, 42, <www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Ensuring-a-Strong-U.S.-Defense-for-the-Future-NDP-Review-of-the-QDR_0.pdf> [Accessed 3 August 2016].

¹⁸ US Congress, House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies, *Oversight Hearing: Quality of Life in the Military* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2016), p. 321, <www.govinfo.gov/app/content/pkg/CHRG-114hhrg20347/pdf/CHRG-114hhrg20347.pdf> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

¹⁹ See US Congress, House Committee on Armed Services, *National Defense Authorization Act For Fiscal Year 2017*, House Report 114-537 (Washington, DC: GPO, 2016), pp. 357-8, <www.govinfo.gov/app/content/pkg/CHRG-114hhrg20347/pdf/CHRG-114hhrg20347.pdf>

Chinese Investment in Darwin Port

A complicating factor in Marine Corps troop rotation was the 13 October 2015 decision by the NT Government's Chief Minister Adam Giles (CLP-Braitling) to lease key facilities at Darwin's port to the Chinese company Landbridge. This lease lasts 99 years at a price of \$506 million (US\$361 million) ostensibly to benefit a financially struggling government. This occurred during the 2015 AUSMIN meeting in Boston with participating cabinet ministers from both countries expressing concern about Chinese land reclamation and construction in the South China Sea. In March 2016, the United States expressed its concern that Chinese port access would enhance intelligence collection on adjacent US and Australian military forces. This problem was further exacerbated by Canberra's failure to consult with Washington and the presence of fuel storage tanks used by the US military being inside the area leased to Landbridge. This would limit potential future Royal Australian Navy construction to parts of the harbour not under Landbridge management.²⁰

Existing concern over foreign investment in Australian agricultural land was reflected in an October 2015 report by the Senate Standing Committee on Economics which did not address national security implications of this topic.²¹ This committee's Economics Reference Committee conducted additional investigation into how Australia's foreign investment framework is affected by the Port of Darwin lease, but no action was taken before the 2 July 2016 Australian election. Any action on Australian government regulation of deals like the Landbridge acquisition will be administered by the Foreign Investment Review board which will have to examine national

[Accessed 1 August 2016]; Ibid., House Committee on Appropriations, *Department of Defense Appropriations Bill, 2017*, House Report 114-577 (Washington, DC: GPO, 2016), <www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CRPT-114hrpt577/pdf/CRPT-114hrpt577.pdf> [Accessed 1 August 2016]; and Ibid., US Congress, Senate Committee on Appropriations, *Department of Defense Appropriations Bill, 2017*, Senate Report 114-263 (Washington, DC: GPO, 2016), <www.congress.gov/114/crpt/srpt263/CRPT-114srpt263.pdf> [Accessed 1 August 2016]. For the status of US defence and other appropriations legislation for individual fiscal years see <www.congress.gov/resources/display/content/Appropriations+for+Fiscal+Year+2017> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

²⁰ See Australia, Northern Territory, Chief Minister, 'NT Government Selects Landbridge as its Partner for the Port of Darwin', Media release, 13 October 2015, <newsroom.nt.gov.au/api/attachment/byId/7260> [Accessed 2 August 2016]; Jane Perlez and Yufan Huang, 'Chinese Lease of Australian Port Troubles U.S.', *New York Times*, 21 March 2016, p. A1; and Paul Barnes et. al. 'Chinese Investment in the Port of Darwin: A Strategic Risk for Australia', *Strategic Insights*, 101 (December 2015), pp. 1-2, <www.aspi.org.au/publications/chinese-investment-in-the-port-of-darwin-a-strategic-risk-for-australia/SI101_Chinese_investment_Darwin_v2.pdf> [Accessed 2 August 2016].

²¹ Australia, Parliament, Senate Standing Committee on Economics, *Foreign Acquisitions and Takeovers Legislation Amendment Bill 2015 and Related Bills [Provisions]* (Canberra: Senate Standing Committee on Economics, 2015), <www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Economics/Foreign_Acquisitions_2015/~media/Committees/economics_ctte/Foreign_Acquisitions_2015/report.pdf> [Accessed 2 August 2016].

security implications of foreign investment (in consultation with national security policymakers) and strengthen existing deficiencies in Australian law. This should be a priority for the Australian Parliament and narrowly re-elected Turnbull Government when it resumes sitting on 30 August 2016.²²

Public Opinion in Australia and United States

There is general support for close security ties between Australia and the United States in public opinion polling from both countries. A 21 June 2016 Lowy Institute poll saw 68% Australians rank terrorism and national security as high priority issues; 30% saying China is Australia's best friend in Asia; and 43% each of all respondents saying that Australia's relationships with China and the United States are equally important. On China, 85% of respondents have positive views of China's people, 79% of China's history and culture, and 75% of China's economic growth. Conversely, Chinese regional military activities are viewed negatively by 79%, Beijing's government is viewed negatively by 73%, and Chinese investment in Australia is viewed negatively by 59% of Australians. In addition, 74% of Australians favour conducting Freedom of Navigation operations in the South China Sea to oppose China's expansive claims in those waters and 71% of Australians see their alliance with the United States as being very or fairly important to Australian security.²³

A Darwin area protest group called Base Watch opposes the Marine Corps rotational force. It is concerned that the presence of US military personnel will drag Australia into military conflicts, that Australia should not be politically aligned with the United States, and will have adverse social and environmental impacts on the Darwin area.²⁴

American public opinion polls reveal positive feelings about Australia, but ambivalence about whether Washington should have long-term military bases in Australia. A May 2014 Chicago Council on Global Affairs poll found 42% of respondents saying the United States should have these bases in Australia with 55% opposing such bases.²⁵ A February 2015 Pew Global Attitudes project poll found 44% of Americans had a great deal of trust in Australia and 36% a fair amount of trust in Australia. These polls indicate generally strong support in both countries for maintaining and strengthening

²² See Barnes et. al., 'Chinese Investment in the Port of Darwin', 1; and Australia, Treasurer, 'Australia's Foreign Investment Policy', (Canberra: Australia Treasurer, 1 July 2016), pp. 8-9, <firb.gov.au/files/2015/09/Australias-Foreign-Investment-Policy-2016-2017.pdf> [Accessed 2 August 2016].

²³ *The Lowy Institute Poll 2016* (Sydney: The Lowy Institute for International Policy, 21 June 2016), <www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/lowy-institute-poll-2016> [Accessed 2 August 2016].

²⁴ Basewatch, <basewatch.org/#/> [Accessed 2 August 2016].

²⁵ Chicago Council on Global Affairs, *Chicago Council on Global Affairs Poll, May, 2014* [survey question], USKN.2014CCGA.Q17H, GfK Knowledge Networks [producer], Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, iPOLL [distributor], [Accessed 2 August 2016].

security ties, but should not induce complacency about these ties due to the increasing economic and strategic influence of China in the Western Pacific and how that might affect Australian strategic interests.²⁶

Conclusions

The seasonal rotational Marine Corps deployment to Darwin signifies a tangible US commitment establishing a minimal but symbolic US troop presence in an increasingly important geopolitical neighbourhood encompassing the Indian Ocean, Indonesian archipelago and South China Sea (SCS) for strategic and humanitarian regions. This occurs during a time of increasing Chinese military assertiveness in these waters and goes against recent patterns of reductions in overseas US troop deployments.²⁷

Both Australia and the United States need to develop realistic cost estimates for how much it will cost to sustain this force and eventually expand it. This is problematic for the United States given its federal budget deficit of US\$590 billion in August 2016²⁸ and public debt of US\$19.93 trillion as of 30 December 2016.²⁹ The financial and military sustainability of this debt and of US forces in the event of a regional conflict was also questioned by the NDP in 2014 noting that reduced defence spending stemming from sequestration under the 2011 Budget Control Act had caused allies and adversaries to question the United States' resolve and that the United States has insufficient ships and aircraft to cope with potential western Pacific combat scenarios. This reduced defence spending has fallen from US\$678 billion in 2011 to an estimated US\$576 billion for 2016. In addition, overall US military personnel strength during the Obama Administration has fallen from

²⁶ See Pew Global Attitudes Project, *Pew Global Attitudes Project Poll, Feb, 2015* [survey question]. USPSRA.040715G.R02C. Princeton Survey Research Associates International [producer]. Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, iPOLL [distributor], [Accessed 2 August 2016]; Brendan Taylor, 'Unbreakable Alliance?: ANZUS in the Asian Century', *Asian Politics and Policy*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2016), pp. 75-85, doi:10.1111/aspp.12232; and Alan Bloomfield, 'To Balance or to Bandwagon?: Adjusting to China's Rise During Australia's Rudd-Gillard Era', *The Pacific Review*, vol. 29, no. 2 (2016), pp. 259-82, doi:10.1080/09512748.2015.1013497.

²⁷ See Tim Kane, 'The Decline of American Engagement: Patterns in U.S. Troop Deployments', Hoover Institute Economics Working Paper 16101 (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institute Press, 2016), <www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/16101_-_kane_-_decline_of_american_engagement.pdf> [Accessed 3 August 2016]; Bert Chapman, 'China's Nine-Dashed Map: Continuing Maritime Source of Geopolitical Tension', *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2016), pp. 146-68, <docs.lib.purdue.edu/lib_fsdocs/121/> [Accessed 3 August 2016]; and Gurpreet S. Khurana, 'China as an Indian Ocean Power: Trends and Implications', *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2016), pp. 13-24, doi=10.1080/09733159.2016.1175127.

²⁸ US Congressional Budget Office, 'Budget', 2016, <www.cbo.gov/topics/budget> [Accessed 3 August 2016].

²⁹ US Department of the Treasury, Bureau of the Fiscal Service, 'Daily Treasury Statement', 30 December 2016, p. 2, <fms.treas.gov/fmsweb/viewDTSFiles?dir=a&fname=16123000.pdf> [Accessed 23 January 2017].

1.419 million in 2009 to 1.301 million in 2016 with all military branches experiencing personnel reductions.³⁰

Tensions and the future possibility of conflict in this region, already rising due to increased defence spending by area countries, has also increased due to the 12 July 2016 ruling of the International Court of Arbitration against China's grandiose nine-dashed map claims in SCS regional waters affecting multiple adjoining nations including Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam³¹ and China's petulant reaction to this verdict demonstrated by Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang describing the court as a "law-abusing tribunal", saying the ruling was "illegal and invalid" and Chinese President Xi Jinping claiming that the South China Sea had been Chinese since ancient times, and that Beijing rejected conclusions affecting what it sees as its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights. China also announced it would hold military exercises with Russia in the SCS in early August 2016 and companion naval exercises in the East China Sea (ECS).³²

Australia and the United States must maintain professional and candid communications with China, but assertively defend international freedom of navigation and air space in the SCS, Indian Ocean and ECS. There must also be strengthened interoperability and cooperation between US and Australian militaries in this geopolitically strategic region which the Marine Corps deployment represents. There also needs to be a strengthening of mutual US-Australian engagement as part of the US pivot to Asia which must be primarily military to enhance Australian security and give Australian ports and airfields conventional deterrence levels beyond existing ADF capabilities.³³ The Marine Corps deployment also gives Australia an opportunity to develop a maritime and expeditionary orientation toward the

³⁰ See National Defense Panel, *Ensuring a Strong U.S. Defense*, pp. 2-3; and US Office of Management and Budget, 'Table 4.1: Outlays by Agency, 1962-2021', Historical Tables: Budget of the United States Government, 2016, <obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/node/18060> [Accessed 20 April 2017]; *ProQuest Statistical Abstract of the United States 2017 Online Edition*, 'Table 529: Department of Defense Personnel By Service Branch and Sex: 1960 to 2015 [Selected Years, as of September 30], Department of Defense', [Accessed 5 August 2016].

³¹ Permanent Court of Arbitration, 'PCA Case N° 2013-19-In The Matter of the South China Sea Arbitration...Between the Republic of the Philippines and the People's Republic of China' (The Hague: Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2016), <www.pcacases.com/pcadocs/PH-CN%20-%2020160712%20-%20Award.pdf> [Accessed 3 August 2016].

³² See Dean Cheng, 'South China Sea After the Tribunal Ruling: Where Do We Go from Here?', The Heritage Foundation, 20 July 2016, p. 2, <www.heritage.org/research/commentary/2016/7/south-china-sea-after-the-tribunal-ruling> [Accessed 3 August 2016]; and Nick Grimm, 'Military Exercises Between Chinese and Russian Navies in South China Sea to Be Closely Watched', Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2 August 2016, <www.abc.net.au/news/2016-08-02/military-exercises-between-chinese-and-russian/7682104> [Accessed 3 August 2016].

³³ Ben McLennan, 'Revitalising Team US-Australia: Australia's Greatest Strategic Challenge', *Australian Defence Force Journal*, no. 189 (November/December 2012), pp. 55-65, <www.adfjournal.adc.edu.au/UserFiles/issues/189%202012%20Nov_Dec.pdf> [Accessed 3 August 2016].

Indo-Pacific region as a core component of its national security strategy.³⁴ The increasing presence of US troops in this region comes at a time when the United States also faces acute strategic challenges internationally demonstrated by a resurgent Russia, the threat posed by Daesh, a nascent nuclear Iran, and an increasingly assertive China seeking to Finlandise waters in the SCS, ECS, and even the Indian Ocean. The United States's ability to address these problems is worsened by its fiscal problems which will require painful entitlement program reforms, tax reforms, and implementing more growth-oriented economic policies. Both countries must invest increased and strategically targeted defence spending in areas affecting their regional security interests including countering Chinese Anti-Access Area Denial (A2AD) capabilities, unmanned and autonomous systems, precision munitions and surveillance, and cyberspace and counterspace capabilities Beijing is likely to use to exploit its opponents' vulnerabilities and strategic power projection. Canberra and Washington must meet these threats in an environment in which the Obama Administration has consistently failed to provide political and moral clarity and funding due to a delusional ideology that military conflict is not an intrinsic part of international political order.³⁵

It remains uncertain whether the Donald Trump Administration will make the requisite strategic changes to US grand strategy and commit the financial resources necessary to make the Marine troop rotation to Australia more than a symbolic gesture and eventually represent a decisive, effective, enduring, and forceful rebalancing deterrent against Chinese aspirations to obtain absolute hegemony over the Indo-Pacific Ocean regions. A 17 February 2017 meeting in Brussels between Defence Minister Marise Payne and US Secretary of Defense James Mattis discussed mutual strategic interests between these two countries and Foreign Minister Julie Bishop met with Vice-President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson during her 20-22 February 2017 visit to Washington for additional high-level discussions of important bilateral issues. Trump's 28 February 2017 address to a joint session of Congress stressed "We expect our partners, whether in the NATO, the Middle East, or in the Pacific, to take a direct and meaningful role in both strategic and military operations, and pay their fair share of the cost."³⁶

³⁴ Michael Evans, *The Third Way: Towards an Australian Maritime Strategy for the Twenty First Century* (Canberra: Australian Army, 2014), pp. 25-26, <www.army.gov.au/sites/g/files/net1846f/thethirdway_evans.pdf> [Accessed 3 August 2016].

³⁵ See Robert G. Kaufman, *Obama Doctrine: How Obama's Grand Strategy Weakened America* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016), pp. 145-84; Colin Dueck, *The Obama Doctrine: American Grand Strategy Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); *The Military Balance 2016* (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 2016): pp. 214-7, doi:10.1080/04597222.2016.1127567; and National Defense Panel, *Ensuring a Strong U.S. Defense*, pp. 24-25, 38-39.

³⁶ See Australia, Department of Defence, 'Counter Daesh Conference, NATO Head Quarters', Media release, 17 February 2017, <www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-

A key indication of the Trump Administration's willingness to properly resource and provide personnel for the Marine Corps troop rotation and the Asia-Pacific Pivot will be reflected in its congressional budget request. The initial blueprint of this was released in March 2017 and called for increasing military spending by US\$54 billion representing one of the largest single year increases in US history. Other provisions of this proposal included increasing the lethality of land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace forces, strengthening the Army by rebuilding readiness and reversing strength reductions, rebuilding the Navy by increasing ship numbers, ensuring a ready and fully equipped Marine Corps, and enhancing Air Force tactical fleet readiness and technical superiority by purchasing more Joint Strike Fighters while also repairing aging infrastructure. A 4 April 2017 Trump-Turnbull meeting in New York City to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea saw both leaders stress the enduring bonds of friendship between these two countries while emphasising their anticipated security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific. Determination of the political and financial seriousness of Washington's strategic intentions toward this region will be reflected in forthcoming congressional debate on these proposals, their enactment into subsequent defence spending legislation, and implementation in subsequent US national security policy documents such as the 2018 *Quadrennial Defense Review* and forthcoming editions of the *National Security Strategy of the United States* and *National Military Strategy of the United States*.³⁷

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releases/counter-daesh-conference-nato-head-quarters> [Accessed 24 February 2017]; The White House, Office of the Vice-President, 'Readout of the Vice President's Meeting with Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop', 21 February 2017, <www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/02/21/readout-vice-presidents-meeting-australian-foreign-minister-julie-bishop> [Accessed 24 February 2017]; and US Department of State, 'Public Schedule: February 22, 2017', 22 February 2017, <www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/appt/2017/02/267761.htm> [Accessed 24 February 2017]; and *Congressional Record*, 163 (35)(28 February 2017): H1389, <www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-2017-02-28/pdf/CREC-2017-02-28.pdf> [Accessed 10 May 2017].

³⁷ See US Office of Management and Budget. *America First: A Budget Blueprint to Make America Great Again*. (Washington, DC: GPO, 2017), pp. 15-16, <www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BUDGET-2018-BLUEPRINT/pdf/BUDGET-2018-BLUEPRINT.pdf> [Accessed 10 May 2017]; and White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 'Readout of the Meeting Between President Donald J. Trump and Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull of Australia', 5 May 2017, <www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/05/05/readout-meeting-between-president-donald-j-trump-and-prime-minister> [Accessed 10 May 2017].