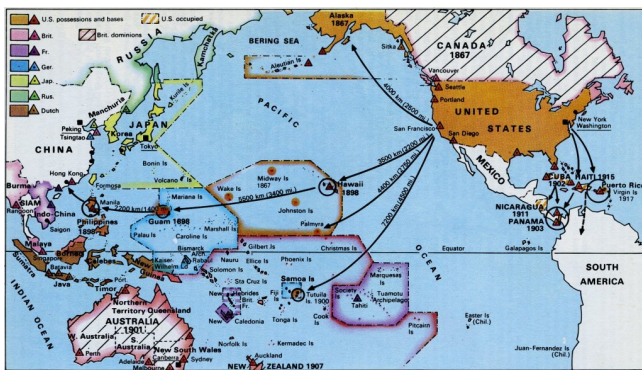


The daggling appendage: Australia and the Ausmin talks

By admin

16 November 2012

The US juggernaut is positioning itself with some speed, while the policy free wonks in Canberra catch their breath. [Dr Binoy Kampmark](#) reports.



THE U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION results are still warm and President Barack Obama's heralded "pivot" (some call it "rebalancing") towards the Asia-Pacific is gaining some speed. The Australian-US ministerial talks being held in Perth were always going to be a tame affair – the great chiefs from across the Pacific making sure their outlying posts were still in order and that the drinks were still being served on time. The formula went to script — the usual unreflective Australian views, and the all revealing American perceptions about power in the Asia-Pacific.

U.S. Secretary of State [Hillary Clinton's remarks](#) were telling. For one, that everyone can frolic in the playground of power:

"The Pacific is big enough for all of us."

Australia, loyal janissary, compliant to a fault, had been instrumental in anchoring peace and prosperity in the region with US power. She was certainly not remiss to express happiness

that Washington had gotten another ally on the UN Security Council — one happy to voice a noisy "yes" on all issues American. Might the administration be so kind as to make sure that the first missile that strikes Iran has an Australian flag attached to it? We would be so grateful.

There has already been a first rotation of US marine troops in Darwin, with the next wave of troops scheduled to arrive in April next year. Anyone with a sense of imperial history should know that occupying troops are never liked, even if the term occupation doesn't figure in the lexicon. Residents are happy to make their imperial defenders pay for local goods and services (drink, food, ready sex), but are just as happy to bayonet them given the chance.

A survey of the bland exchanges during these ministerial talks shows the usual trite positions. Clinton is keen on the mutual [building of](#)

"...a more mature and effective multilateral architecture for the region that can help settle disputes peacefully, promote universal rights (and) greater trade and commerce within an economic system that is open, free, transparent and fair."

This is striking, given the fact that such trade arrangements being negotiated – the [Trans-Pacific Partnership](#) being foremost on the agenda – has proven to be highly secretive, an enemy of free expression and potentially stifling for non-American companies. The aim

of the arrangement is to punish online piracy, and the true enemy lurking in the detail is China — and other powers and citizens who refuse to abide by the US anti-counterfeiting regime.

There was some blather about monitoring space debris.

An American radar will be transferred to Western Australia to provide surveillance of an increasing laying of space clutter. As for the resolution of territorial disputes in the South China Sea, Senator Bob Carr claimed:

"We don't take sides on the competing territorial claims."

The collective pronouncement absolves Carr from actually explaining that it is very singular, with Australia as some daggling, obedient appendage.

This dangling appendage has been good enough to prostrate itself before the demands of the Washington establishment, enacting a constricting regime through the *Defence Trade Controls Bill 2011*. According to Clinton, the measure will supposedly boosting trade, helping companies collaborate to spur "innovation".

This is simply nonsense. The submission by Universities Australia (Feb 9, 2012) to the Senate highlights several concerns that were not addressed:

'The Bill will make it an offence for a university to supply information, assistance or training in relation to goods listed in the Defence and Strategic Goods List (DGSL) in prohibited circumstances without a permit.'

While universities in Australia might not deal in goods per se in this context, they deal with knowledge connected with them. The mind police have been unleashed.

Other matters are summarised: impacts on

what may or may not be taught by Australian universities; to whom such information may be taught to, and with whom Australian researchers engage with in terms of specific research; what might be published by Australian researchers and the research materials that may be transferred by Australian universities to non-Australian collaborators within our outside Australia. The irony of the act is that it will go along hamstringing Australian innovation, while giving the American side of matters a boost. Similar measures of deprivation were undertaken by the Soviets on their eastern satellites in Europe during the Cold War. This is plunder by stealth.

Scratch the mutuality of it, and we have a better picture of the "alliance" — a case more of master and servant.

Former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating, who has a habit of being as sharp as a tack, was on to it. Before an audience at the State Library of Victoria, he [noted that](#):

'During the current prime ministership, that of Julia Gillard, the US president Barack Obama made an oral and policy assault on China and its polity, from the lower chamber of our Parliament House.'

China is the big issue — to be managed, to be integrated and, if necessary, to be fought. The term "containment" was avoided in the joint communiqué between US and Australian officials — but again, "containment" is a term avoided much like "occupation" or "US base". Most prefer to look somewhere else. This is a proposition that is a guarantor of war if ever there was one. Tense political arrangements that are armed to the teeth culminate in only one thing – lethal conflict. Taking the carriage of history in second class – Australia's feted position – will see increased access of US naval forces to the Stirling Naval Base in Perth, a continuing presence of Australian personnel in Afghanistan after 2014, and a

long term rotation system in Darwin ready and willing for the US marines.

Australian negotiators are famous for being rolled in Washington — and they have managed, in their denser moments, to play a very small second fiddle in the power game. These recent talks have simply confirmed that fact. Australia, as Keating now terms it, is the grand “derivative” power, rather than one assertive, diplomatic and skilful in navigating between Beijing and Washington. Never you mind what Chinese state-owned media have claimed — that Canberra risks being “caught in the crossfire” of US and Chinese confrontation. Australia is the somnambulist of Asia — and it may well pay a very heavy price when it wakes up.

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