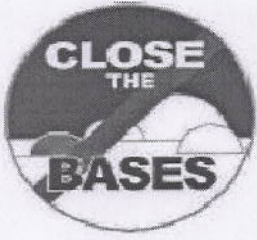


SUBMISSION NO. 3



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RECEIVED

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Submission by
the Australian Anti-Bases Campaign Coalition
regarding the North West Cape

Introduction

The military base at North West Cape has been and remains controversial.

The base was designed as part of the US's MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) policy during the cold war. Its function was to communicate to nuclear armed and powered submarines the order to fire nuclear missiles at the then Soviet Union. US strategy was to have as many ways as possible to inflict maximum damage on Soviet Union from under the water, on the water, from the air, from land and from space. North West Cape was an important Command Control and Communications nodule in the system for nuclear war.

Film footage of a grinning US ambassador giving Australian Government representatives a peppercorn as rent for North West Cape was a concrete expression of Australian subservience to the United States and a lack of US respect for Australian interests which we still contend with today.

North West Cape has attracted peace demonstrations and other forms of criticism and protest. It will attract more until this blot on the national estate is removed.

Recent History

At the end of the cold war the US withdrew and the base was handed over to Australian use for its small submarine fleet – a fleet of six Collins Class vessels which apparently can only manage to have one on station at any one time.

Australian taxpayers paid for the base upkeep and maintenance.

The US returned to use it, apparently without charge, during its first and second incursions into Iraq.

Indian Ocean

Attention to the Indian Ocean has been limited among US policy makers in recent years, with the exception of the base at Diego Garcia.

However with India emerging as a major regional power, this situation is changing as Washington and Canberra both seek to maximise their leverage and connections with India.

Speaking recently to the Asia Foundation in San Francisco, Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd said:

'The critical region for our future now extends to include the Indian Ocean as well. It is in the interests of both the US and Australia for India to play the role of a major international power. India is increasingly looking east with interest, both for strategic and economic reasons, and because of long-standing cultural connections.'

However, the US position on India is contradictory. US policy makers have explicitly stated in the past that their country will not tolerate competition that threatens their economic or military hegemony.

The US has recently declared the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India and China and South Africa) countries as a security risk.

Voice of Russia (12/9/11) reported:

"The BRICS countries, which include Brazil, Russia, India and China, have been listed among those posing a threat to the US national security along with terrorism, cyber attacks, and the nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta urged Washington to protect the planet against these countries' attempts to ruin global stability."

Given this situation and Australia's interest in benign and constructive relations with India, Australia should be extremely wary of permitting the re-entry of the US Navy into NW Cape complex.

Confidence building

Reopening North West Cape as a United States navy base sends a threatening signal to the region, the very opposite of the security and confidence building measures that the Australian Government claims to espouse.

It is a clear signal to China, and also to India, that the US is developing submarine communications as well as positioning troops, ballistic missiles and other equipment able to threaten their countries directly should Washington feel its (not necessarily Australia's) interests are threatened.

We should not be surprised if both countries respond by upgrading their own armaments, encouraging an Indo-Pacific arms race that threatens security and economic development.

The US has been described as 'a military giant and a moral pygmy'. By no stretch of the imagination is it in Australia's interests to assist the US to impose its dominance in the Indian Ocean region.

The result will fatally undermine Australia's security and international reputation.

Countries smaller in size and economic power, such as Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia, are already spending significant amounts of money on their military forces.

Our Anti-Bases Coalition warned the Australian Government that the manufacture of the Collins Class submarines would contribute to an arms race in the region. This is now happening as regional states purchase submarines and put them on station.

The knock on effects of increased military expenditure by our own Government and the other Governments in our region mean problems that could be fixed faster for years. Illiteracy and lack of education could be tackled more diligently and the lack of food security and many more problems will be left because of insufficient funds. The results will be more civil unrest and war.

Submarines

North West Cape will be used for naval communications, especially communications with submarines.

Submarines are offensive attack weapons platforms. The longer the range and greater the weaponry of a submarine, the greater is the risk it imposes.

In seeking to have North West Cape operational as a US naval base again, Australia is supporting US plans to bring its nuclear powered and armed submarines into the Indian Ocean, creating a significant threat perception among regional powers.

The US is moving more and more of its submarines into this region and its fleet is considerable, to put it mildly. It includes

- Ohio class (18 in commission) — 14 ballistic missile submarines, 4 guided missile submarines
- Virginia class (7 in commission, 3 under construction, 4 on order) — attack submarines
- Seawolf class (3 in commission) — attack submarines
- Los Angeles class (43 in commission, 2 in reserve) — attack submarines

The Ohio class can deliver 24 nuclear weapons over thousands of kilometres. It can operate for six months without surfacing.

It is our view that such essentially aggressive, provocative and destabilising attack platforms should be the subject of urgent arms reduction talks. They should not be controlled from North West Cape, making Australia complicit in their use or the threat of their use.

North West Cape would become the foundation for an increasingly aggressive stance by the US and we strongly urge the Committee to deny any use of the base by the US.

Australian submarine fleet

The Federal Government is planning to build another 12 submarines. However, the cost is prohibitive, over 70% of the Australian people object to more money being spent on the military (ANU poll) and it has proved impossible to staff and maintain at sea almost all of the current fleet of 6.

The North West Cape facility is far in excess of Australia's need and has been likened to having a semi trailer when a simple station wagon could do the job. Australia does not need North West Cape and our country's economic and security needs would be better served by closing down the military functions of the base.

Economic growth

Over the years there were claims that a US withdrawal would bring economic ruin to the town of Exmouth and local communities.

As the Anti-Bases Coalition regularly and publicly argued, this threat had no foundation, especially with developing tourism and ecotourism and the nearness of Ningaloo reef.

We have been proved right and the area is thriving.

The return of the US navy to North West Cape will not bring significant economic benefits. Experience at similar US military facilities around the world makes it clear that the military's major needs are supplied by the US corporation Halliburton which acts as quartermaster. Local benefits are largely restricted to hotels and brothels.

There is no argument for the base on economic grounds.

China is a vitally important trading partner for Australia. There is no basis for an Australian Government to offend the Chinese Government by assisting the US to threaten it. It makes no sense!

India, a country awakening from long years of colonialism and backwardness, is increasingly looking to Australia for goods, natural resources and services. Why would Australia risk threatening and offending this country?

The planned treaty on North West Cape should be rejected because it will disturb valuable political and economic relationships for US objectives which may well not be in Australia's interests.

Left over assets

The treaty before your Committee suggests that at some time in the future, if the US again withdraws from North West Cape, the Australian taxpayers will reimburse the United States for the value of left over building and other assets.

We find this astonishing and arrogant. It also flies in the face of all the public statements of how much the US has appreciated Australian cooperation in the past.

After decades of past and planned future use of the base for a "peppercorn rent", such assets should surely be seen as recompense for Australian hospitality.

Remediation

We are opposed to Australia signing the treaty to allow the US navy to again use North West Cape. However, should such a treaty be finalised, we argue strongly that agreement for Australia to fund remediation should be excluded.

The US military is infamous as the biggest polluter in the world, damaging sites in many places around the world including continental USA. This is true as a result of warfare (Iraq is a notorious example) but also of US preparations for war.

US military refusal to remediate sites they have contaminated in this region of the world alone, for example in Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines, is scandalous.

One significant example is the presence of the US Navy base in Vieques, Puerto Rico since 1941 and its use of the island as a bombing range. While the US military claims that Vieques and its off-shore waters were an irreplaceable military practice range, opponents point to the evidence that the Navy's practices destroyed the island's unique ecology and continually jeopardised the health, livelihood and safety of the Viequenses. The public health effects are horrific. For example, the cancer rate for children 11-19 years old is 256% higher than the rest of Puerto Rico.

The Australian Government could face significant environmental contamination and serious US intransigence regarding clean ups if there are no strong sections in the agreement on North West Cape requiring the US to pay for remediation.

Security

There is a need for a radical rethink of both security and industrial policies based on broader concepts of sustainable security and disarmament that encompass environmental, social and economic dimensions such as global warming, where Australia could make a major contribution to a new political economy of common security. This would require significant restructuring of the armed forces and the military-industrial basis, in addition to alternative security policies, arms conversion and effective controls on the arms trade.

In the early 1980s, the United Nations Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues argued that the military basis of relations between countries was increasingly irrelevant in a world that faced a series of growing economic and social crises. What was needed was a new common security approach that prioritised international development issues. The Commission called for a graduated program of cuts in nuclear and conventional forces leading to general and complete disarmament as a longer-term but achievable objective.

Security is often interpreted to mean military security -- the capacity to identify and meet perceived threats to a nation by military means, by the use or the threat of the use of force.

However, security is multi-dimensional and it is bad policy to analyse defence in isolation. The over-emphasis in casting the military as Australia's guarantee of "security" has not engendered a true culture of national security.

Australia's security can be enhanced by attention to social, political and humanitarian issues

which affect the people of this country as well as the peoples of neighbouring states.

Resources committed to developing the military have meant that less is available for constructive cross-border work such as preventive diplomacy and Radio Australia, to offer just two examples. Further, the paucity of Australia's overseas aid is a source of national shame.

While certain basic defence functions could be maintained, including protection of domestic borders and territorial waters, the security context would be one that prioritised broader concerns of environmental and economic security, using the savings from reduced military expenditure to support civil programs. These could include a major expansion of renewable energy and energy efficiency programs with the objective of reducing carbon emissions and dependency on oil and gas imports, while also stimulating new industries and employment opportunities.

Instead of a military alliance with the United States, Australia needs friendly and mutually beneficial relations with all countries. Militarising Australia and delivering unfaltering support for US aggression and threats to use force against other countries cannot ensure security for Australians.

Conclusion

We call on the Committee to reject the reintroduction of the US Navy into North West Cape. We recommend that the base become a centre for tourism and scientific research rather than a military base threatening our regional neighbours and Australia's security and economy.

*Dennis
Doherty*