

# Australia is handing control to an intelligence superstate

Australia is in the middle of a push to remove decisions on national security from the purview of governments and hand them to unelected intelligence agencies, just as a host of financial decisions have been outsourced in the name of the “free market” (see the “[Genesis of Austerity](#)” series, part 7 of which is in this week’s Almanac). Just as no government would want to preside over the “bail-in” of people’s deposits, nobody whose position requires winning re-election will be keen to enforce the planned crackdown on freedom of speech now under way, just the first of many freedoms at risk in an economic breakdown crisis.

The current drive for federal laws to censor political debate—in the form of the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023—is the latest salvo in a long-term drive to smother the emergence of real leadership and viable solutions as the current economic system disintegrates. The Australian Citizens Party has been warning of this push and its purpose for over three decades. These range from our effort to stop the first raft of post-September 11, 2001 antiterrorism laws (recounted in “Simon Crean, the last major party leader to oppose Australia’s ‘dangerous allies’”, AAS, 28 June), to our exposures of the 2019 push for an international agreement on internet censorship, led by then New Zealand PM Jacinda Ardern and French President Emmanuel Macron following the Christchurch massacre. (Reported in our 18 July Media Release, “[Denounce Albanese’s Orwellian social media censorship law](#)”.)

The push to outsource the security response to alleged extreme threats was admitted five years ago by one of Australia’s most powerful bureaucrats, Secretary of the Department of Home Affairs Mike Pezzullo, at a Five Eyes Ministerial meeting held in August 2018 on Queensland’s Gold Coast. Pezzullo demanded a “transnational model of security” comprising pacts that supersede national borders, effectively a global police state. The Five Eyes network comprises leaders of the intelligence organisations of the USA, UK, Canada, Australian and New Zealand; in other words they are unelected bureaucrats, and worse, stooges for the Anglo-American war party.

As AAS [reported](#) at the time, Five Eyes meetings are top secret, but “Iron” Mike let the cat out of the bag ahead of the ministerial, at a 19 June 2018 Washington, DC International Summit on Borders, in a presentation headlined “Rethinking the Security Role of the State in a Complex and Connected World”. For decades, security has been dealt with “within jurisdiction”, he said, but “this is no longer the view held by the Five Eyes partners”. He described the upcoming Gold Coast summit as “a trail-blazing one”. He demanded the “transformation of the state”—once viewed as possessing “majestic power”—with a “transnational model of security” requiring reorganisation of the very notion of government itself and at times requiring the state to become “less visible”.

He foreshadowed new “values, norms and legal constructs”—which have certainly materialised thick and fast within the arbitrarily fashioned “rules-based order”—to tackle security threats in a globalised world. He insisted that “*unity of command, clarity of authority, and singularity of purpose* need to be hardwired into our security architecture lest our agility and flexibility to respond be compromised. [Emphasis added.] We certainly need to *re-think the paradigm that domestic security and law enforcement can be exclusively executed within national jurisdictions.*” (Emphasis in original.)

A prime example revealing the push for the transnational security model today, is the case of Top Gun pilot Daniel Duggan, accused of selling military secrets to China. Commentary in a 22 October 2022 British *Daily Mail* article on his case noted that “as all the members of Five Eyes ... were affected by the scandal, *a joint strategy is required to deal with it, with every state agreeing the same measures*.” Prime Minister Anthony Albanese recently displayed the same preoccupation. Discussing the Ukraine war in a press conference after the 11-12 July Vilnius NATO summit, he declared that “security can’t be considered to be just behind national borders. Because our world is so interconnected, Australia must be engaged and have a seat at the table.” The same justification is made for the AUKUS (Australia, UK, USA) alliance and the myriad of similar, nesting alliances which are building towards a Global NATO.

## War on whistle blowers, journalists

Pezzullo was the inaugural secretary of the new Home Affairs department, and it was he who pushed for the super-ministry modelled on the UK Home Office, from 2001 when he was chief of staff to then-Opposition leader and Iraq war supporter Kim Beazley. The Home Affairs ministry was

achieved in December 2017 under Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, who achieved broad coordination and direction of Australia's five spy agencies through the new Office of National Intelligence. Turnbull specified that this provided a "single point of coordination" with our Five Eyes partners. This was followed by an April 2018 Commonwealth



The April 2018 article by Annika Smethurst which first exposed Home Affairs' plans to spy on Australians, with which Home Affairs chief Mike Pezzullo (right) was not happy. Photo: Screenshots

Heads of Government (CHOGM) cyber alliance, opening broader cooperation with Five Eyes.

This drive was reinforced at the CYBERUK summit in Glasgow, Scotland on 24-25 April 2019. Director of Britain's Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) Jeremy Fleming said the UK will "pioneer a new form of security", and project its power globally as "part of a wide Cyber Power framework". A growing public-private partnership, he declared, is "taking a bold, interventionist approach to involve a wider set of stakeholders", with the "Five Eyes partners" at its "core".

In Australia, 2018-19 were busy years for Pezzullo and friends, and the following is not an exhaustive list by any means:

- In June, foreign interference laws were passed, which put limits on freedom of speech, association and political communication in the name of intervening to stop "hostile state actors" threatening our nation. *The National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Act 2018* came in the context of a building narrative suggesting that China was an enemy not an ally and which included allegations of Chinese "interference". In a 26 June 2018 parliamentary speech about the Turnbull government's bill, MP and Iraq WMD whistleblower Andrew Wilkie said, "I will go so far as to say that Australia is a pre-police state".
- The *Telecommunications and Other Legislation Amendment (Assistance and Access) Act 2018* (known as the encryption laws because it allowed agencies to bypass encryption protocols to gather information) passed the Australian Parliament in December, providing unprecedented spying and hacking powers to Australia's intelligence agencies, and the power to compel Australian citizens to assist them.
- In 2019, in response to the Christchurch attack, the *Criminal Code Amendment (Sharing of Abhorrent Violent Material) Act 2019*, was rushed through parliament on 4 April making an initial effort at internet censorship. This was followed by the Ardern-Macron "Christchurch Call" announced 15 May.
- From 2017 the Australian Federal Police (AFP) were routinely using national security laws to spy on journalists, secretly accessing their metadata; by 2019 a war against whistle blowers and the journalists who published their stories was fully underway. This ranged from the persecution of Australian Tax Office (ATO) whistle blower Richard Boyle (who made "public interest" disclosures about aggressive ATO pressure on debtors in 2017) to monitoring and even fingerprinting journalists responsible for a July 2017 story on possible war crimes in Afghanistan. This campaign reached a peak with the June 2019 raid on the home of News Corp. journalist Annika Smethurst after she exposed Pezzullo's plans to let electronic intelligence agency the Australian Signals Directorate (ASD) spy on Australians.

## Fade to China

While COVID provided a pretext for a time from 2020, China has well and truly taken over from terrorism as the leading "threat" against which these supposed "protections" are aimed. In Australia the anti-China shift commenced in 2016-17, escalating with Professor of Public Ethics at Charles Sturt University Clive Hamilton's 2018 book, *Silent Invasion*, and an influence operation on parliament and security agencies run by journalist-turned government speechwriter John Garnaut, warning of dangerous and growing Chinese influence in Australia. (See "[The China Narrative](#)" series available at [citizensparty.org.au/australian-alert-service-feature-articles/strategic](http://citizensparty.org.au/australian-alert-service-feature-articles/strategic).)

In 2016 US President Barack Obama used the TransPacific Partnership (TPP) to polemicise against China trying to "write the rules" for the Pacific region, and thereafter President Donald Trump, with a host of rabidly anti-China advisers, upped the stakes on the trade front. The media provided vital support with blasts at the character of Chinese President Xi Jinping and his "concentration of power" (not to mention similar blasts at Putin and Russia). Amid a raft of attacks on China using the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to expand its "sphere of influence" the declaration of China as a threat was openly made in revisions to Australian, British and American defence policy documents from 2016.

These included the December 2017 US National Security Strategy and the January 2018 US National Defence Strategy. The new defence strategy announced that "Interstate strategic competition, *not*

*terrorism*, is now the primary concern in US national security". (Emphasis added.) It declared China and Russia "the principal priorities for the [Defence] Department ... because of the magnitude of the threats they pose to US security and prosperity". The strategy asserted that "China and Russia are now undermining the international order from within the system by exploiting its benefits while simultaneously undercutting its principles and 'rules of the road'." It called for dramatic upgrades to US military capabilities, which soon enough would extend to include its allies, via upgrading NATO partnerships and intersecting alliances such as AUKUS. The UK adopted commensurate defence reviews; Australia had led the way with its 2014 US-Australia Force Posture Agreement which established a US military presence here that ushered in AUKUS, and with the 2016 Defence White Paper, which explicitly subordinated Australian defence policy to that of the United States and portrays China as the single greatest threat to the "rulesbased global order" we must protect, with Russia a close second. ("['Black-is-White' Paper singles out Russia, China as threats to 'global order'](#)", AAS, 30 Mar. 2016.)

## **Nothing to see here!**

A Cold War climate has deliberately been fostered to make these moves acceptable. But it serves another purpose. The construction of an "enemy image", in this case China, is the perfect distraction from a domestic crack down. A paper issued jointly by American and Russian academics at the end of the Cold War, "[The Image of the Enemy and the Process of Change](#)", pointed to this under the subhead, "Internal Implications":

The image of the enemy is not only very dangerous for the stability and security of international relations but leads to highly negative consequences for the domestic life of countries. This happens because the hysteria about the outer threat is often used as justification for secrecy and suspicion, covert actions, policies creating 'mobilised' societies, artificial national unity, 'witch hunts', and policies suppressing dissent, all ignoring domestic problems and distracting attention from them. By projecting the blame for these on the enemy, each side protects its own self-esteem from the realisation that it has been unable to solve its own problems.

Taking life-and-death decisions out of the hands of elected governments due to contrived threats is dangerous. As University of NSW Dean of Law Prof. George Williams told the *Australian* way back in 2002, with reference to the ASIO Legislation Amendment (Terrorism) Bill, "*It puts all of the power in the hands of the secret organisations.*" (Emphasis added.) Twenty-one years later the global secret intelligence state has significantly taken shape. Julian Assange, David McBride and Daniel Duggan, the whistle blowers and journalists named earlier in this article, and many more, can attest to that.

*By Elisa Barwick, Australian Alert Service, 26 July 2023*