Australia must break from Anglo-American war machine

By Elisa Barwick

In early 1939 on the eve of World War II, Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies declared: "If she is at war, we are at war." Menzies referred, of course, to Great Britain. Then-opposition leader, Labor's John Curtin, countered that "It is the responsibility of the Australian government and of no other … [to engage] the people of Australia … in war." Britain expected our assistance but refused to give any in return when it was needed. In 1941, when Japan entered the war posing a dire threat to Australia, Curtin would ally with the USA, saying: "Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom".

In essence, nothing has changed, but today it is the USA playing the overt role of dictating Anglo-American terms to Australia. At the conclusion of World War II, following the death of US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt—who had distinctly different ideas—America was co-opted as a partner in the drive to revamp British colonialism, this time under cover of an "informal financial empire".[1] The financiers on Wall Street who had mobilised, but failed, to keep Roosevelt out of office were ready for action. The leftovers of the wartime military-security apparatus, later described as the "military industrial complex" by US President Dwight Eisenhower, was a major part of the operation. A union of defence manufacturers and armed forces, this complex was growing in "unwarranted influence", said Eisenhower in 1961. "The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists, and will persist", he declared.

A preview of Australian veteran journalist Brian Toohey's book *Secret: the making of Australia's security state*, was published on 2 September on Pearls and Irritations, the blog of John Menadue, a former senior public servant under Prime Ministers Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser. Toohey's article "Chained to the chariot wheels of the Pentagon" raised the very issues identified above, albeit without exposing the "Anglo" facet of what the late PM Fraser explicitly referred to as our "dangerous *Anglo*-American allies".

Toohey makes critical points, however, which deserve to be widely discussed. He delves into what has become known in common parlance as the "deep state" apparatus, centred in the "military-industrial-intelligence complex [which has] a huge say in whether Australian governments go to war, buy particular weapons, host US-run military and intelligence bases and ban trade with certain countries. The upshot is that Australia has now surrendered much of its sovereignty to the US."

Toohey exposes the heavily controlled and monitored set-up built by the USA, which "requires almost all countries that buy its weapons systems to send sensitive components back to the US for repairs, maintenance and replacements without the owners being allowed access to critical information, including source codes, needed to keep these systems operating". This makes it nigh impossible for nations to go to war without US permission or to extricate themselves from the US hold. Toohey cites an August 2001 Parliamentary Library research paper which stated that it is "almost literally true that Australia cannot go to war without the consent of the US", and notes that things have worsened since then. Australia has chosen either US-made or -recommended equipment over clearly better options in all recent major military purchases, he writes, from the failed US-made computerised combat data systems for our *Collins*-class submarine—the vessels' most important component—in the late 1980s, to the French-designed "future submarine" recommended by the US Navy in 2016.

The Australian defence force is not allowed "independent access to key operational components of fighter planes, missiles, submarines and surveillance systems", writes Toohey, and it is set to get worse. Upon his return to Australia in 2016, former Ambassador to the USA Kim Beazley gave a speech sponsored by Lockheed Martin, in which he outlined the US plan to turn military "interoperability" into outright "integration". Interoperability with US forces has established "joint" facilities and diverted resources to US operations including for collection of signals intelligence, provision of drone targeting information, targeting and detection for Ballistic Missile Defence programs, and training. Integration means the USA "will sometimes want to use our equipment", says Toohey, citing Beazley's example of the US Marines' use of a large amphibious Australian ship. "Australian equipment and troops will be able to 'plug' straight into US forces when a new war erupts". Likewise, embedding Australian troops deeply within US operations prevents their removal if the conflict escalates.

Beazley described himself as a member of a "deep state", said Toohey, but a "benign one" as opposed to one where "the real power lies in a military/intelligence phalanx" (*sic*). As Toohey commented, "'Benign' is not an obvious description of what Beazley's deep state did to Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan or to elected leaders such as Iran's Mohammed Mossadegh, the Congo's Patrice Lumumba or Chile's Salvador Allende." Such "benign" intentions are also behind Anglo-American efforts to "monitor" ship movements in the Persian Gulf, which Australia has just signed up to under the new maritime alliance dubbed "Operation Sentinel". It will lock us into any military action necessitated by Anglo-American provocations made in the name of ensuring freedom of navigation. Australian leaders must come to their senses before we rig up another hair-trigger for world war.

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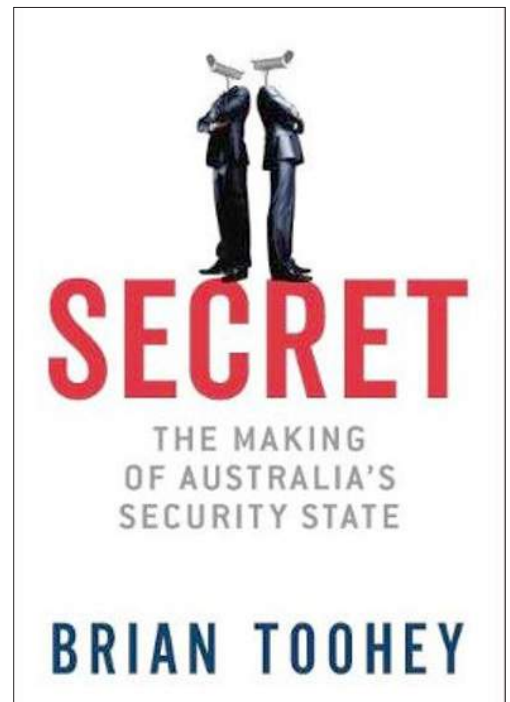
1. As described in "Economic Opportunities for Britain and the Commonwealth" by Katharine West for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995.