

## Defence Review enslaves Australia to the US war machine

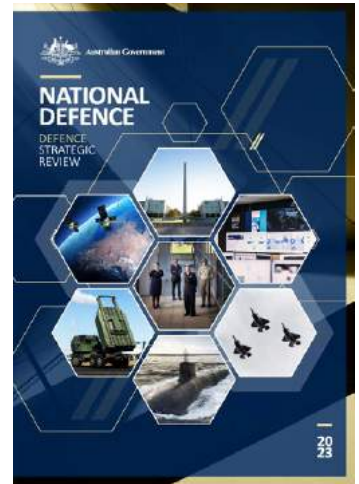
By Richard Bardon

It is difficult to imagine a greater betrayal of Australia than that prescribed by the Albanese Labor government's Defence Strategic Review (DSR). In the name of defending the so-called "rules-based global order", the DSR explicitly proposes—and the government has agreed—not only to restructure Australia's entire military capability into an adjunct of the USA's, but to dedicate the "whole of government" and all economic and intellectual resources to the maintenance of US military hegemony over the Asia-Pacific region. In the name of protecting Australia's "sovereignty", Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has agreed to sign it away to a predatory and opportunistic "ally", on the preposterous presumption that Australia's primary national interest is whatever suits America. All supposedly in preparation to meet a military threat from China that even the US Defence Department admits does not exist.

Australia for its entire history has been either officially or functionally a vassal of successive empires—first as a collection of colonies of, then an autonomous but never actually sovereign federation within the British Empire/Commonwealth; and concurrently since the end of World War II, effectively a US military protectorate, as formalised by the ANZUS (Australia-New Zealand-United States) Security Treaty of 1951. The gradual cession of Australia's military-strategic sovereignty to US geopolitical diktats has arguably been ongoing for that entire period; but in any case it was made explicit when Labor PM Julia Gillard signed on to then-US President Barack Obama's military "Asia Pivot" in late 2011 and began negotiations on the enabling US-Australia Force Posture Agreement (FPA), which was finalised by her Liberal Party successor Tony Abbott in 2014. The Asia Pivot, which Obama declared was aimed at enabling the USA to "write the rules" for China's engagement with the region, entailed Australia becoming the "tip of the spear" for a war upon that country, starting with the deployment of 2,500 US Marines in Darwin. Front-running even the USA, the Malcolm Turnbull Liberal government first explicitly declared China a threat, which Australia must deepen its "alliance" with (read, dependence on) the USA to defend against, in its 2016 Defence White Paper.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, under the terms of the 2014 FPA and with the added impetus of the then newly announced AUKUS (Australia-United Kingdom-United States) "security" and technology-sharing pact, in September 2021 the Scott Morrison-led Liberal government signed agreements with the USA under which Australia will host (largely at our own expense) unlimited numbers and types of American military personnel, weapons and war materiel—and give the USA control of the bases from which they operate.<sup>2</sup> In October 2022 the ABC's flagship current affairs program revealed, and the Albanese government subsequently confirmed, that this would include the "rotational" but in practice permanent deployment of long-range strategic (i.e. nuclear-capable) bomber aircraft in the Northern Territory;<sup>3</sup> and in March of this year, Albanese announced that Australia would also host US and UK nuclear

submarines. As the *Australian Alert Service*, and many strategic policy experts, have repeatedly warned, China (and Russia) have no choice but to assume that both would be nuclear-armed, and respond accordingly by targeting Australia for nuclear strikes in the event a war should break out.

The DSR continues and, were its recommendations followed through, would complete the cession of Australia's sovereignty to the USA, with the sole purpose of assisting it to maintain its military primacy. At its heart, however, are several inherent contradictions that in effect amount to an admission that the whole enterprise is futile for its stated purposes—and therefore, that Canberra understands full well that the USA intends to *provoke* such a war, and is happy to play its part therein.



### Strategic (oxy)morons

The first self-contradiction is that the DSR pretends to be aimed at establishing a "sovereign capability" by which Australia will be able to defend itself from all credible threats, by equipping the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to "shape Australia's strategic environment, deter actions against Australia's interests, and respond with credible military force, when required"—if not in absolute terms, then at least sufficiently to "change the calculus so no potential aggressor can ever conclude that the benefits of conflict outweigh the risks". It proceeds to proclaim however that Australia cannot do so, nor will it be able to for the next several decades (at least), and therefore is and must for the foreseeable future remain dependent upon the USA: "Australia does not have effective defence capabilities relative to higher threat levels. In the present strategic circumstances, this can only be achieved by Australia working with the United States and other key partners". To justify keeping Australia a permanent *de facto* Anglo-American strategic outpost rather than an actually sovereign nation, the DSR goes on to state that "Australia's strategic culture has long been based on a major power alliance. Every Australian Government since Federation has assessed our strategic circumstances and reaffirmed the centrality of an alliance partnership in relationship to our strategic interests." Therefore, "Contrary to some public analysis, our Alliance with the United States is becoming even more important to Australia ... [and] will continue to grow and adapt." (Note the capital "A" for "Alliance", as though it were a discrete entity or personage deserving of a proper noun—even though ANZUS is not really an "alliance" at all in the military sense, given it does not oblige any party to come to the others' aid were they attacked, only to "consult" on an appropriate response.)

The second glaring contradiction is that having thus put all its eggs in the basket of continued US strategic hegemony, the DSR paradoxically acknowledges not only that this

1. "'Black-is-White' Paper singles out Russia, China as threats to 'global order'", AAS, 30 Mar. 2016.

2. "AUSMIN/AUKUS make Australia staging point for WWII", AAS, 22 Sept. 2021.

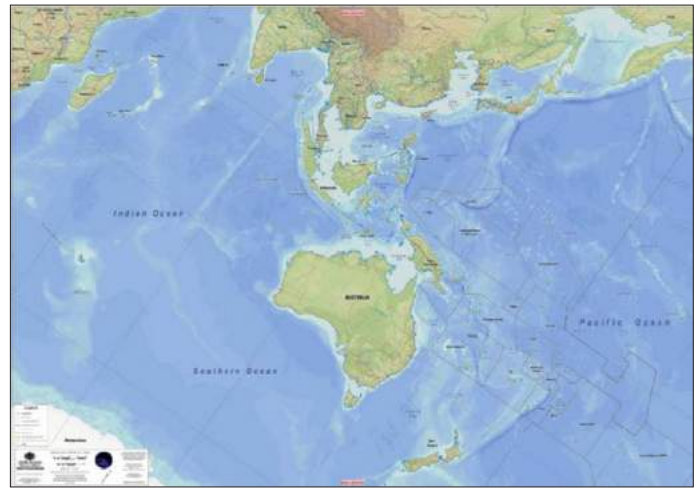
3. "B52s, NATO integration: Albanese courts WWII on two fronts", AAS, 9 Nov. 2022.

cannot be maintained, but that it is already lost. “Our Alliance partner, the United States, is no longer the unipolar leader of the Indo-Pacific”, it laments, using the new-old name coined for the extended Asia-Pacific region by Nazi geopolitical theorist Karl Haushofer in the 1920s, and adopted by US strategic planners in 2018.<sup>4</sup> And the third is that by setting out to help the USA restore itself to that position, alongside “partners” such as Japan and (in the unlikely event it were so foolish as to let itself be roped in) India, the DSR claims that it is “work[ing] to support the maintenance of a regional *balance of power*”, in order to “contribute ... to the *collective security* of the Indo-Pacific” (emphases added). Yet as University of Sydney historian Professor James Curran has noted, these two concepts are in fact antithetical: “the very phrase ‘collective security’”, Prof. Curran wrote 24 April in the *Australian Financial Review*, “is a critique of realpolitik. It rejects contending alliance systems and armaments competition. It views the balance of power system not as the guarantee of security, but as the source of the problems besetting the international arena.” In the world inhabited by the authors of the DSR (and Australian strategic policy wonks in general), however, they have attempted to twist them into synonyms. As Dr Vince Scappatura, a lecturer in politics and international relations at Macquarie University in Sydney, wrote 2 May in the public policy journal *Pearls and Irritations*, “maintaining a ‘balance of power’ has long been a euphemism in Australian political discourse for sustaining American military dominance or ‘primacy’. Even during the post-Cold War ‘unipolar’ moment, when uncontested American power dwarfed that of any other regional power... The exercise of Australian foreign policy makes it clear that rhetorical support for ‘multipolarity’ and a ‘rules-based order’ is a discourse mainly intended to preserve US hegemony.”

### ‘Whole-of-nation’ militarism

In pursuit of this doomed endeavour, the DSR prescribes that the entire ADF be made over, either into or to support the operations of a light, mobile expeditionary force “optimised for littoral operations in our northern land and maritime spaces”. (“Littoral” means the part of a body of water nearest and thus most subject to influence from the shore; in geographic and military terms, it generally refers to the relatively shallow seas over a landmass’s continental shelves.) As Scappatura notes, “The biggest change foreshadowed by the DSR is to the Army, which will have its infantry fighting force dramatically scaled back and be optimised for littoral operations and enhanced long-range fire. In this respect, the Australian Army will follow emerging trends in parts of the US Army, and especially the US Marines.... Tellingly, the ADF has been actively engaged in recent years in military exercises with US armed forces as they test new force structures and operational concepts such as ‘island hopping’ and ‘mobile basing’ throughout the Indo-Pacific to defeat—with no hint of irony—China’s A2/AD [anti-access/area denial] capabilities designed to deny America’s ability to project force into China’s ‘periphery’.”

The Navy likewise is to be restructured supposedly to support these operations, and more importantly those of Australia’s one-day-maybe fleet of eight to twelve “nuclear-powered, conventionally armed” submarines, and for that purpose is slated to receive a much larger fleet of smaller but better armed surface vessels than previously planned. Given that based on recently leaked US Navy documents, only one quarter (!) of those subs are ever likely to be on duty at any one time due to much more frequent breakdowns and higher



The DSR included this strange orientation map to show the “Indo-Pacific”.  
Photo: Screenshot

maintenance requirements than previously disclosed, one can easily imagine that they will spend most of their time working with “visiting” US subs instead. The more so since, as former Defence Department strategist and AUKUS critic Prof. Hugh White wrote in a [recent essay](#) for the National University of Singapore’s Asia Research Institute, “Even if all goes according to plan, Australia will not have a minimum viable fleet of six AUKUS submarines in service till the late 2050s, and realistically it will be much later.” Defence Minister Richard Marles has hired recently retired US Vice-Admiral William Hilarides to conduct the DSR-prescribed “review” of the design and composition of Australia’s future surface navy, reportedly at a cost to the Australian taxpayer of \$4,000 a day.

Even more troublingly, Albanese and company have agreed with the DSR’s proposal that the operations of the whole of government, starting with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), be subordinated to Defence to whatever extent necessary to pursue this newly defined doctrine, which has been dubbed “National Defence”. The DSR states: “*National Defence* must be anchored in a broader national strategy. This strategy should harness all elements of national power to protect Australia’s strategic interests.... Australian statecraft now requires a consistent and coordinated whole-of-government approach to international affairs and the harmonisation of a range of domestic and external national security portfolios, from trade and investment to education, minerals and resources, clean energy, climate, industry, infrastructure and more.” Former Australian diplomat and Defence official Dennis Argall, writing 26 May for *Pearls and Irritations*, aptly described this as “an alarming grab by the defence force for command of national resources ... [which] imperiously asserts command over government generally, its social, economic, and environmental actions”. In short, he warned, the DSR demands that the defence and security establishment in effect be placed above civil authority—that is, the abolition of the very essence of democracy. “The kind of strategic study Australia needs ... is one which gives a sense of our civil society’s capacities, needs, aspirations—and our neighbourhood”, he wrote. “The [DSR] is an entirely inappropriate, narrow-minded, chauvinistic, militaristic thing that belongs in a country practising for fascism, the submergence of the civil power and civil society.” All so the USA can use Australia as a disposable asset in a war that cannot and is not meant to be won, but whose intended purpose is weaken China and the rest of Asia such that they can no longer challenge the Anglo-American “rules-based order”, in the unlikely event that it does not result in the thermonuclear annihilation of humanity instead.

4. “The Nazi roots of the ‘Indo-Pacific strategy’”, AAS, 20 Jan. 2021.