

## Observations of the Defence Relationship by the Components of the US Government

### Introduction

- 5.1 The delegation achieved significant insight into the Australia US defence relationship during extensive visits to the US Combatant Commands. Pacific Command and Central Command are the agencies with the most frequent contact with Australia and the ADF and in these Headquarters the delegation experienced the very strong good will that flows to Australia from the Defence relationship. The Strategic think tanks visited by the delegation in the US also understood the relationship that has developed between the two Defence Forces and in some cases regarded this relationship as the closest interaction between the US and any of its allies.
- 5.2 In the last component of the visit to the US, the delegation sought to determine whether the strength of the defence relationship extends to the top levels of the US Government.
- 5.3 To determine the extent the Defence relationship influences thinking at the executive and legislative levels of the US Government the delegation had a series of meetings in Washington D.C. and in New York These included extended discussions with Ambassador Richardson and his senior advisers at the Australian Embassy, Ambassador Dauth and his senior staff at Australia's permanent mission to the United Nations, meetings with senior US Department of Defence officials and with some of the leaders of key Congressional Committees.

## **An Overview of the Relationship**

- 5.4 The delegation was grateful to receive considerable input from the senior members of the Australian Embassy staff. These included: Mr Gary Quinlan, the Deputy Chief of Mission; Admiral Raydon Gates, Head Australian Defence Staff Washington; Mr Andrew Shearer, Minister Counsellor (Political); Ms Anastasia Carayanides, Minister Counsellor (Commercial); Ms Jane Hardy, Counsellor (Congressional); and Mr Michael Shoebridge, Counsellor (Defence Policy). Much of the material briefed to the delegation was background material to prepare the members for discussions with US officials and will not be reproduced in this report, however a number of observations added considerably to the delegations understanding of the key issues in the Australia US relations.
- 5.5 The delegation was briefed that while understandably much discussion of the relationship in Australia concentrates on its value to this country, the alliance is also regarded as very important to the US. Australia is regarded in Washington as a key US ally in East Asia, to the extent that our alliance is used to benchmark the US alliance with other allies such as Japan.
- 5.6 It was also made clear to the delegation however, that the relationship was not static. The alliance was described as having a hard or pragmatic edge, leading to the question “What will Australia offer next?” Naturally the US, like Australia, will seek to understand where the benefit is for them in each transaction between the two nations. However it appears clearly understood at the Executive Level of the Administration that Australia more than carries its weight in the Pacific, thus freeing American resources to be used in locations they are harder pressed. This observation accords with the impression given to the delegation at HQ Pacific Command.

## **The US Department of Defense**

- 5.7 The US Department of Defense forms part of the Executive Arm of the US Government. To explore the Department view of the bilateral Defence relationship the delegation met with Mr Peter Florey, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs and a number of senior members of the Defense staff.
- 5.8 Mr Florey and his staff were particularly positive about the Defence relationship. They described it as being based on shared values underpinned by a considerable history of common sacrifice. Australia was considered to be part of a very small group of countries with whom the

- US shares such a position. Mr Florey also made it clear that the relationship with Australia was not taken for granted and the range and depth of the dialogue between the two countries is considered remarkable.
- 5.9 An example of the extent to which Australian opinion is trusted by the US Department is the degree to which Australian military officers are embedded in key US Defense Headquarters. The delegation was briefed on the types of sensitive tasks being undertaken by these officers and acknowledges the benefit to both organisations of this input.
- 5.10 A further example of the role Australia has in the relationship emerged during discussion of both countries' relationships with Indonesia. The US Defense officials acknowledge the importance of Indonesia in the Asia / Pacific region and equally acknowledge the lack of understanding of the newly democratic nation by US agencies. They value the relationship Australia has established with the Government of President Susilo Bambang YUDHOYONO, particularly because legislative restrictions imposed by the US Congress prevent interaction between the US Military and Indonesia. The US Defense officials encouraged the delegation to take up the issue of Indonesia with the US Legislature during their meetings. The delegation accepted this request and engaged the Congressional officials at some length.
- 5.11 The discussions with the Defense officials made clear to the delegation how important Australia's bilateral relations with its regional neighbours are to stability in the Asia Pacific region, particularly as they can be used to increase the level of understanding of regional issues within America. The Australian leadership and facilitation of western access to Aceh in the aftermath of the Boxing Day Tsunami have demonstrated this regional leadership position to a wide audience in the US and highlighted the retarding effect of US restrictions on interaction with Indonesia.
- 5.12 During the course of the discussion attention turned toward the third partner of the ANZUS Alliance, New Zealand. The US response was quite straight forward. They indicated that Australia and New Zealand are viewed quite separately by the US, not together as the formal ANZUS alliance suggests. The New Zealand contributions to operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan have been very well received by the US leadership but some tension remained in the relationship over New Zealand's restriction of access to nuclear powered US Navy ships. The delegation observed that the Australia US defence relationship was currently more substantial than the US defence relationship with New Zealand.
- 5.13 In further discussion about combined training the US Defense officials described the importance of the Joint Combined Training Centre (JCTC) to US involvement in the region. The benefit to such organisations as the US

Marines and Navy in Pacific Command has been described in other chapters of this report but the Department officials also envisioned the JCTC as a location where Australia and the US could also interact with other regional allies, bringing countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines into the excellent interoperability arrangements achieved between Australia and the US. This expansion of military interaction was described as necessary to ensure US engagement was seen to extend beyond what may appear to be selfish Global War on Terror goals.

- 5.14 The discussions with the US Defense officials were frank and wide ranging.

## **The US Congress**

- 5.15 To get a complete sense of the view held toward Australia by this immense and complex legislative body is a full time task for the staff of the Australian Embassy in Washington D.C. The delegation sought the opinions of peer committees in the Congress to gain a snap shot of the thinking of those working on similar issues in the US.
- 5.16 The outcome of the meetings with the peer Committee Chairs were quite different to those with the leaders in the US Defense Department. Where those discussions included very specific understanding of the relationship with Australia and the key elements of interoperability, the discussions in the Legislature were less specific and necessarily reflected the wide diversity of views within this representative arm of government.
- 5.17 The delegation commenced its meetings at Congress with Congressman Jim Saxton, Chairman of the Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities Sub Committee of the House Committee on Armed Services. Chairman Saxton explained to the delegation that Australia was warmly regarded by the majority of members of the Congress but was rarely more specifically considered. However, he continued, members such as himself and those who deal with defence and national security matters regard Australia's specific contribution to the alliance very highly. He grouped Australia with the UK as two of the few countries who understand the nature of the global terror threat, making the bonds between the nations even stronger.
- 5.18 Chairman Saxton appeared to be less aware of the specifics of the Defence relationship. He was aware that Australia was a partner in such major programs as the Joint Strike Fighter, but had less understanding of broader engagement and interoperability issues. Chairman Saxton

explained that he believed that Congress would value the international involvement in the JSF program highly, making it more attractive to the law makers than exclusive US programs, such as the F22 Raptor.

- 5.19 The delegation next met with Senator Lisa Murkowski, the Chair of the Sub Committee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. Senator Murkowski is a relatively recent appointment to Chair of the Asia Pacific sub-committee but clearly determined to master her brief and valued the delegation view of the region. She was aware of the general nature of the defence relationship between the two countries, particularly the Australian involvement in both Iraq and Afghanistan but otherwise confirmed Chairman Saxton's view that Congress members rarely focussed on Australia or its issues.

Figure 5.1 Delegation members meet with US Senator Lisa Murkowski in Washington D.C. (R-L Sen Steve Hutchins, Sen Lisa Murkowski, Mr Steve Gibbons MP and Hon Mr Graham Edwards MP)



- 5.20 Senator Murkowski was particularly interested to hear the Australian view of the importance of Indonesia in East Asian and Pacific affairs. The delegation stressed the importance of the removal of legislative bans on US International Military Education and Training (IMET) in achieving the recommencement of US Defense engagement in Indonesia. Senator Murkowski was aware of the sensitivities over these restrictions. She advised that the excellent cooperation achieved with Indonesia during the period of Tsunami relief and cooperation with the investigation of the deaths of US civilians near a mine in West Papua was easing concerns amongst her Congressional colleagues. This type of cooperation was considered essential before legislative restrictions could be lifted.

- 5.21 The last delegation meeting in the Congress was with Congressman Rob Simmons, the Chairman of the Intelligence, Information Sharing and Terrorism Risk Assessment Sub Committee of the House Committee on Homeland Security. Congressman Simmons is a Vietnam Veteran and former member of the CIA with extensive understanding of intelligence and intelligence sharing issues.
- 5.22 Congressman Simmons discussed the issue of intelligence sharing between allies by first describing to the delegation some of the challenges faced in getting agencies within the US to share their knowledge amongst themselves. These 'tribal' battles continued to reduce the effectiveness of the US response to the terror threat. The Chairman observed that removal of some of the procedural restrictions on access to US systems and intelligence for close allies such as the UK and Australia was still in a queue behind these US domestic reforms.
- 5.23 The delegation appreciated the opportunity to meet with their peers in the US Congress. Though it is difficult to draw conclusions about the US Congress as a whole from such a brief visit it appears that members have a level of affection and trust for Australia. However it is possible to extrapolate from the three meetings with Congressional leaders that the Defence relationship between the two countries is not uniformly well understood within the US Legislature. Further work at this level is necessary if Australia is to attempt to overcome legislative restrictions to technology transfer, intelligence access and to remove legislative restrictions on US military interaction with Indonesia.