

Former Australian prime minister warns of US-provoked war danger

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Former Australian Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser has been given prominent coverage in the Fairfax-owned press for his view that Australia should revise its interpretation of the ANZUS alliance with America, shut down US bases, including the crucial communications base at Pine Gap in central Australia, and end the stationing of US marines in Darwin.

Fraser has for some time been warning of the possibility of a US war against China and that the US-Australia alliance, together with the close integration of Australian and US military forces, mean that whatever decisions might be taken in parliament, Australia would be involved from the outset. So far these warnings have not been given wide publicity.

Last Saturday, however, the *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH) published a major story on Fraser's views on its news pages, complete with a large picture, plus an extensive story in its weekend magazine, accompanied by a series of photographs.

The immediate occasion was the publication of Fraser's book *Dangerous Allies* in which he warns of the implications of the US alliance. The decision to promote the book seems to indicate concern within sections of the political establishment that mounting war dangers in Asia and the escalation of tensions over Ukraine require at least some examination of where Australia is positioned strategically.

Fraser told the SMH that with tensions rising in the East China Sea between Japan and China there was a real danger of conflict and he had become "very uneasy" over the level of Australian compliance with US strategic interests.

"Our armed forces are so closely intertwined with theirs and we really have lost the capacity to make our own strategic decisions," he said.

Echoing the analysis made in numerous articles published on the WSWS, Fraser said such was the high level of military integration, particularly through the crucial US communications base at Pine Gap, that Australia would have difficulty convincing the world it was not taking part in any US-led military conflict, even if formally Canberra decided

to stay out of it.

While not advocating an immediate end to the ANZUS alliance, Fraser said there should be a more basic interpretation of the treaty, restricting its scope to consultation, rather than the assumption that Australia would be automatically involved in any US military conflict.

However, his call for the ending of the involvement of HMAS Sydney with the US Navy's Seventh Fleet, together with the closure of the Darwin military base within a year and the shutdown of Pine Gap within five years would see the end of the ANZUS treaty.

Fraser said the Obama administration's "pivot" to Asia, which relies heavily on Australian facilities and participation, was based on a wrong-headed US strategy aimed at containing China.

Fraser, known throughout his parliamentary career as a strident Cold War warrior—he was a defence minister during the Vietnam War and was a vigorous opponent of the Soviet Union's intervention in Afghanistan in 1979—said "military encirclement" had been necessary in relation to the Soviet Union but "China is quite a different story."

How different was underscored in a speech he delivered in September 2012, warning of a "major danger" that the US could start a war against China. That speech applauded "the contribution China has made to peace and to stability worldwide."

The speech also denounced Labor's defence minister Stephen Smith for "political spin of the worst kind" when he denied there would be US bases on Australian soil, saying the comments were "designed to deceive Australians on matters of peace and war."

While these remarks were reported, they did not lead to any wider comment in major press outlets. Last Saturday's Fairfax coverage indicates that a certain shift may now be underway.

In an editorial published on Anzac Day, April 25, the *Sydney Morning Herald* took a different line from the Murdoch-controlled media which regularly denounces, often in frothing terms, any questioning of the US alliance as

delusional.

Headlined “A day for mature reflection”, the editorial said that a “glib patriotism” should not crowd out the lessons of the Gallipoli campaign. The idea that the tragedy represented some “coming of age in Australia” was an arbitrary construct aimed at obscuring the fact that young Australians and New Zealanders were “used as cannon fodder by obtuse British strategists.”

And then, in a thinly-veiled reference to the contemporary situation, it continued: “Lest we forget the lessons of this war. One important lesson, the *Herald* believes, is that Australians should not be sent far from our shores in military expeditions or invasions instigated by other nations and in which Australia does not have a direct and significant stake.”

The editorial dovetailed with the views expressed by Fraser in the *Sydney Morning Herald* magazine piece authored by Robert Manne and published the following day.

Fraser told Manne it was disgraceful that US president Obama was allowed to announce the “pivot” to Asia on the floor of the Australian parliament and that it was “an absolute disgrace” that this momentous decision was scarcely debated in Australia.

According to the Manne article, Fraser considers Australia has now arrived at a paradoxical situation. Having traditionally looked to “great and powerful friends” to protect it, the only national security danger at present “arises from the nature of our relations with one of those great and powerful friends.”

Fraser insisted his central policy recommendation was: “To make sure that America does not have the capacity to force Australia into a war which we should well and truly keep out of.”

These remarks point to the underlying political motivations for what has been described as Fraser’s “left turn.”

He is concerned that the Australian political establishment’s whole-hearted embrace of the US “pivot” may create a situation where there are no political safety valves available in conditions where mass opposition begins to rapidly emerge in the working-class and youth to the growing US war drive.

As a minister of the Liberal government of the time, Fraser directly experienced such a transformation in Australian politics at the end of the 1960s. Participation in the Vietnam War, which appeared to enjoy widespread public support, as reflected in the Liberals’ major election victory in 1966, had, within three years, resulted in mass protests and the growing radicalisation of students and working class youth.

Fraser is anxious to prevent any repetition of that experience. As he commented at the time of his September

2012 speech, if the Australian public really knew the function of the US bases at Pine Gap and elsewhere it could provoke “outrage.”

Fraser wants to ensure that any opposition is rendered harmless by diverting it into a version of “Australian exceptionalism” based on the illusion that if only “Australia” takes an independent stand it can avert being dragged into the maelstrom being created by the US in Asia and more broadly.

But history, including his own, directly speaks against Fraser.

If any government were to even contemplate the measures he now advocates, much less implement them, it would be subject to massive political destabilisation from the United States and a “regime change” operation.

In June 23–24, 2010, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, who had expressed the need for the US to try to make some accommodation to China, was removed in an inner-party coup orchestrated by “protected sources” of the US embassy within the Labor and trade union apparatus.

Rudd’s ousting recalled the infamous Canberra coup of November 11, 1975 in which the Whitlam Labor government was sacked by the Governor-General Sir John Kerr and Fraser installed as prime minister. Fraser is not only intimately familiar with the inner workings of the Canberra coup, but with the mass opposition it provoked.

One of the reasons for the coup, which directly involved the US Central Intelligence Agency, was American concern that Whitlam was going to reveal details about the operations of the Pine Gap base and might even move to close it—the policy now advocated by Fraser himself.

These historical experiences underscore bankruptcy of any claim that the enormous dangers posed by the US imperialist juggernaut can be averted by pursuing a path of “national independence.”

On the contrary, only the closest international unification of the working class in the struggle against imperialism on the basis of a socialist perspective can prevent the eruption of a new war, the outlines of which are becoming ever-more apparent. This is one of the central themes of the online May Day rally being organised by the International Committee of the Fourth International on May 4.



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