**QPLC FLUTTER Putting pen to paper 23-9
*small actions, big outcomes***

**Lily pads, corridors and bubbles: Australia-USA Force Posture Agreement**

From a rotational ‘training area’ to a more permanent strategic ‘theatre gateway’, the US Department of Defence has shifted its perspective and planning for northern Australia. Simultaneously, geopolitical tensions are increasing in several regional hotspots. This does not bode well for Australia, as it increases the likelihood of becoming embroiled in another US-led conflict.

‘Lily pads’, ‘corridors’ and ‘bubbles’ are not exclusively military terms. Rather they are terms for strategically clustering geographical locations, their industries and workforces (bubbles), securing safe travel between such locations (corridors) and establishing small bases between which teams can quickly move (lily pads).

The Huffington Post in 2012 stated: “…the Pentagon has been pursuing as many lily pads as it can, in as many countries as it can, as fast as it can…at the American Enterprise Institute, the goal should be ‘to create a world-wide network of frontier forts’ with the US military ‘the global cavalry’ of the twenty-first century”. Lily pads, bubbles and corridors also provide easier access to spying, the use of drones, and militarization of domestic industry and government agencies. Their projection of power, both political and economic, can impact local resources and social stability, while influencing domestic decision-makers.

The Strategist, in a 2022 article by John Coyne, stated that there are two regions in northern Australia that are obvious choices for such military expansion by the US. The Cairns, Townsville and Charters Towers local government areas could provide geographic and economic support for activities in the Pacific. The Katherine-Darwin areas provide the space, infrastructure and industrial base to support an even greater range of activities.

In 2014, the US-Australia Force Posture Agreement (FPA) was signed, effectively legitimizing increased US military operations and personnel in Australia. The FPA augmented the existing Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between the two countries and considerably extended the capacity of the US to use northern Australia to operationalize its strategic military ambitions without the consent of the Australian Parliament.

As well as increasing the number of US Marines in Darwin, the FPA enables (for example) the transiting and stationing of US warcraft at the Tindal and Darwin RAAF bases, including six B52 bombers capable of transporting nuclear weapons and flying round trip from Australia to China requiring only air refueling.

Kellie Tranter, writing about the FPA for Pearls and Irritations, quotes Dr Bianca Baggiarini, ANU Lecturer in Strategic and Defence Studies: ‘ …if the region continues the stockpiling of military technologies and capabilities, war becomes more likely.’ Tranter goes on to say, ‘None of us want to be a military-administered colony’.

Meanwhile, the AUKUS security pact assures US military operability across the western and eastern coasts of Australia, and across our southern water ports. Between the FPA in the north and AUKUS elsewhere, the United States military command has effectively ‘pinchered’ Australia into vassal status.

**Friends may wish to** contact their Member of Parliament expressing concern over the dangerous influence of the Force Posture Agreement to Australia’s sovereign right to choose peace over war. Meetings may wish to consider holding an information session. The IPAN website includes an example of a draft letter and speaker contacts <https://ipan.org.au/end-the-force-posture-agreement/>).

Resources

Coyne, John. *Defence review must consider force posture in the context of Australia’s strategic geography,* The Strategist, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 22 October 2022. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/defence-review-must-consider-force-posture-in-the-context-of-australias-strategic-geography/>

Force Posture Review. Report 145: Treaties tabled on 26 August and 2 September 2014. Australian Government. APH.gov.au

Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN) website, includes: video of the IPAN FPA Forum on 21 May 2023, a pending Parliamentary petition, a fact sheet for circulating and draft letter to send your Parliamentarian (<https://ipan.org.au/end-the-force-posture-agreement/>)

Mason, R.C. *Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) what is it and how has it been utilized?* Defense Technical Information Centre, Congressional Report, Congressional Research Service, 18 June 2009.

Tranter, Kellie. *What is the US-Australia Force Posture Agreement (FPA)?* Pearls and Irritations 30 May 2023. <https://johnmenadue.com/what-is-the-us-australia-force-posture-agreement-fpa/>

Vine, David. *The Lily-pad strategy: how the Pentagon is quietly transforming its overseas base empire.* Huffington Post. 16 July 2012, updated 6 December 2017. <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/us-military-bases_b_1676006>