Submission to the 2015 Defence White Paper

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This is only a short submission in general terms and touching upon Australia's Strategic Policy Approach.

Events in Ukraine have triggered a return of the Cold War and NATO and Russia are already engaged in a proxy war there. Australia should not take sides but try to help resolve the conflict as a neutral arbiter. Nothing can be worse than a return of the Cold War.

The rise of IS in the Middle East should be seen in historical context as reactions to the haughty actions by a “coalition of the willing”. So was the emergence of Al Qaeda, as a reaction to the Cold War policies of the USA. General Najibullah was right; he had the right strategies and was poised to taming the illiterate tribal religious fanatics of Afghanistan. America should have helped him or should have left him alone to do his job. If Najibullah was left alone, nothing that followed since 1980 would have happened – there would be no rise of the Talibab, no Al Qaeda, no 9/11, no Afghan war, no Iraq war of 2003, and no IS today. Now, there is another “coalition of the willing” in the making, and again, like turning against Najibullah, two vital powers are being left out – Syria and Iran – to ensure its failure in the long run. And no one can foresee what greater menace could emerge from another failure. Saddam Hussein had warned about the Mother of All Wars that the West did not understand and the media made fun of it, laughed at, ridiculed and joked about it, and mocked him. That proverbial Mother has given birth to many offsprings since, and will continue to do so as long as the West fails to take proper cognisance of the realities. Saddam must be laughing in his grave.

The actions over a decade ago cannot be undone, so the reactions must be faced with realities in mind, not with wishful dreams. It is impossible to undo the Wrong of the past, but it is certainly possible to do the Right things now and in future. Leaders seem to be aware of these, and so are talking frankly about not setting any time-lines. They should also reconsider sidelining Assad of Syria and Iran's theocratic regime. They should intensely reassess which is the greater menace, and the need of befriending lesser evils tactically and temporarily to tackle the greater evil. There are a lot of geopolitical complexities and vested interests involved that are supposed to remain unspoken, if not secret, that should be negotiated diplomatically and cleared up/settled rather than swept under the carpet.

As our foreign minister has indicated, Australia is aware of the diabolic nature of the issue, and should therefore tread carefully, not be carried away by Big Brother pressure, and try her best to influence a balanced outcome. As on climate change and removal of carbon tax, Australia has proved herself capable of being heard and not prevented from doing what she must. Australia must prevail upon this diplomatic opportunity and independence of agreeing to disagree. What to agree on and what to disagree are the hard parts. Books by Prof Hugh White of the ANU and former PM Malcolm Fraser are recommended must-read guides in deciding the dos and don'ts.

Closure to our home, the emerging China-Japan conflict. Australia has vital interests in good relations with both countries. But a scenario is developing in which USA is keenly eyeing on Chinese emergence as a regional power and inclining to growing Japanese militarism as a counterbalance to such a prospect. Japan is trying to make the most of it by
casting off her image as a pacifist nation and embracing venturesome militarism. Japanese armed forces would now be allowed to take part in combat actions overseas to help out friendly nations such as the USA. China's claim on all uninhabited South Pacific islands is not helping her cause. Here, Australia has a far greater role to play as an arbiter following historical realities.

Historically, China never waged wars outside its own territory (so also India) whereas Japan has been an atrocious invader and occupier. Given the opportunity, Japan will rise up to its past imperialistic grandeur. It is more likely than not that China can be persuaded to settle her disputes with her neighbours over the South Pacific islands through negotiations with or without arbiters under the UN Law of the Seas. Australia can and should play a very important role in this. That Japan is a pluralistic capitalist country and China is not should not be a matter for taking sides. China's claim of a capitalist economy run by a communist regime puzzles everyone but she should be left alone to handle her affairs herself. The motto to remember is: any harm to Chinese economy will harm Australia economically, therefore, it is in Australia's interest to keep up the friendship.

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