



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**

**PROOF**

**COMMITTEES**

**Treaties Committee**

**Report**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 1 November 2011**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Senator FAWCETT

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Senator FAWCETT (South Australia) (17:53): I rise to address report No. 121 of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties on the Harold E Holt Naval Communication Station at Exmouth. My colleagues have detailed the background to this treaty and the fact that it replaces a treaty that was struck before the facility was commissioned in 1967. Essentially, it extends the existing conditions of joint use whereby there is full disclosure and knowledge of what is occurring in that facility, which works to the benefit of both the United States and Australia.

Particularly in light of some of the comments made by my colleague Senator Ludlam, I would like to talk a little more broadly about our relationship with the United States and some of the benefits of having these agreements on shared use facilities. At the moment much is being made of the fact that the United States is facing a period of economic difficulty and there is considerable drawdown in its defence spending. At the same time, regional powers, whether they be China or India, are facing periods of significant growth and expanding influence. Those who read papers dealing with defence and strategy will have seen a deal of writing just recently on the expansion of the Chinese navy and their bluewater capability. The US Secretary of Defence, Mr Panetta, has been working in the region recently and looking at the expansion of the Chinese navy and their operations through the East and South China Seas. And the Indian Navy, for example, reports some interaction now with the Chinese navy. So there are many people who argue that if our economic dependence on China is increasing and they are an increasingly important player in the region then surely our relationship with the United States should change, and some people would even argue it should decrease. There are many people, though, who are studying this area in great detail and who argue completely the opposite—who say that the best outcome for the region would be for the United States to continue a strong engagement in the region and that that in fact would be welcomed by the Chinese.

One of China's great concerns is our North West Shelf project, the Gorgon development and the Guangdong agreement. The plan is that some 10 per cent of China's energy needs will be met by that region by 2020, so from an energy security perspective they have great

concern about what happens in trade routes and what happens in this region. Clearly, if there are strong relationships between the United States and Australia in our region and security in the trade routes around the Malacca Straits et cetera then it removes an uncertainty from their perspective and removes a reason for them to extend even further the activities of their naval fleet, with its increasing capability. That then adds a deal of security and certainty to regional nations in terms of the balance of powers, stability and their own need to expend moneys on defence. In that context, I welcome not only the tabling of this treaty but also the fact that we are looking at AUSMIN discussions between Australia and the United States on increasing cooperation in Australia for training areas and bases, whether that is up in the Northern Territory at the Bradshaw training area, at HMAS *Stirling* or access to other bases.

There is a real opportunity here for us to build a new relationship with America. The ANZUS alliance, since 1951, has been the basis of our engagement with the States, and that specifically had its origins in this issue of regional stability. Post World War II, particularly in light of the Korean War, the Americans were very concerned to allow Japan to re-engage with the international community and to rearm. It was the nervousness of regional nations such as Australia and New Zealand that led to the ANZUS alliance being signed, such that we felt comfortable that in a regional sense countries could re-emerge.

What we see now is the emergence of new powers in the region, so the ANZUS alliance and a relationship with the States has increasing importance. Signing agreements like this one on the Harold E Holt Communication Station, I believe, is just the first step in renewing the relationship with the US. We should be embracing the fact that they are looking for opportunities. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in the November issue of *Foreign Policy* magazine, says that one of the most important things for the United States to do in the coming years is to reinvigorate and invest in its relationships and strategic partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region.

We have the opportunity not only to engage in a meaningful and strategic manner with their military but also to make sure that there is a benefit to both our defence capability and our industry capability. If we are

operating common platforms, there is no reason why we should not be able to include in those agreements areas where our industry capacity can be involved in the through-life support of maritime, land and air assets. That enables a sustainable base of work to supply and support our own military as well as growth opportunities and transfer of technology opportunities from the United States to our industry.

There are real opportunities here to bring greater stability to our region, greater benefit to our industry and better cooperation and certainty for our military and those of our regional neighbours through an intentional and close cooperation with the United States. It is for that reason that I am very happy to support the recommendation of this report, which is that the Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of the United States relating to the Operation of and Access to an Australian Naval Communication Station at North West Cape in Western Australia, which was done in Washington in 2008, be done, and that binding treaty action be taken.

I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.