

## Containing China - and Australia

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*Alison Broinowski*

Observers have for several years been noticing that Australia is an increasingly militaristic society. The incremental militarisation of Australian policy goes much further than our current re-deployment in the Middle East. Little by little, our humanitarian programs have been militarised (to ensure delivery of aid), our aid programs have been securitised (to protect aid workers), Federal police have been deployed abroad (to work with other countries against corruption, drug trafficking and people smuggling), and Special Forces 'training' Iraqi troops carry diplomatic passports (to get around their status problem with the Iraq government).

National Security has become the new growth industry in government and academia, and ASIO and ASIS receive huge funding increases at the expense of health, education and social services. Not surprisingly, little public critique of the underlying purposes of national security is heard from the people who benefit from it.

A new book from Des Ball and Richard Tanter, and an interview with them in the *Saturday Paper* by Hamish McDonald ( ["Japan and US enclose Chinese coast within sensor net"](#)) give us rare insights into what is going on. I haven't yet got the book, *The Tools of Owatsumi*, but the facts are clear. The US and Japan are extending what McDonald calls a 'trip-wire' of undersea sensors around the Chinese navy, even while American diplomats deny that the 'pivot to Asia' is the latest effort to contain China, and Australian leaders claim we don't have to choose between China and them.

Of course the American pivot's target is China, and it was no accident that it was announced in Canberra. After years of sidling up to the US in advance of its wars, virtually begging to be involved, and hosting the bases from which surveillance and distant attacks are coordinated, Australia is already deeply implicated. Just to make sure the US will defend us against attack, we have given them permanent bases (and are paying for them) in the Northern Territory, which we now learn from a premature American announcement are likely to host B1 bombers. We are extending the runway at Cocos Island to enable American drone launches. We have senior naval officers embedded with US command in the Pacific. We collaborate with our 5-Eyes partners, using a network of undersea cables through the region to share surveillance intelligence on our neighbours.

There is no way that Australia cannot be involved in this latest effort to deny China the influence off its coast that the US has for years exercised in its own maritime sphere of influence. And, given Prime Minister Abbott's declaration that Japan is Australia's closest regional friend, and is likely to sell us submarines, we can expect that involvement to become deeper and more complex. So deep, in fact, that, if there is war, intentional or accidental, even over a small island in which Australia has no interest, we could not stay out of it, and we would make ourselves a target. The cost to Australia of going to war against our largest trading partner is incalculable, and the consequences unimaginable.

I dread reading Des and Richard's book, but I must, and so should we all.