

Australia: Outsourced to the US Military Establishment

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It's a very funny thing. In the US, the provision of services in such industries as security and intelligence is outsourced in a sprawling complex of contractors and subcontractors. In Australia, the entire military and security establishment is outsourced to Washington's former mandarins, many of them earning a pile in consultancy fees. This, perhaps, is what Australia's Defence Minister Richard Marles [means when he talks](#) about the Australian Defence Force moving "beyond interoperability to interchangeability."

The list of recipients is depressingly long, and suggests that Australia has ceased to have any pretensions of sovereignty in defence matters. Take, for instance, the appointment of US Vice Admiral William Hilarides to the post of reviewing the future of the Royal Australian Navy's surface fleet, for which he is pocketing US\$4,000 a day. Since 2016, [he has received](#) US\$1.3 million in contracts from the Australian government.

Hilarides featured [in a story](#) by the *Washington Post* last year, which revealed that two retired US admirals and three former US Navy civilian leaders were "playing critical but secretive roles as paid advisers to the government of Australia during its negotiations to acquire top-secret nuclear submarine technology from the United States and Britain."

It gets worse. Six retired US admirals are identified as having offered their services to the Commonwealth since 2015. Hilarides was particularly keen, having retired a mere two months before seeking permission to advise the Australians on how best to extend the life of its Collins Class submarine fleet.

US Navy officials had few problems with the application, approving it within five days and forwarding it to the US State Department, which treated it as a mere formality. Hilarides, in his application, stated that he would be receiving money from a contract between the Australian Commonwealth and the consulting firm Burdenschaw Associates, based in Fairfax City, Virginia. The same firm has received US\$6.8 million from the Australian taxpayer since 2015.

In a statement provided to the paper, the Australian Department of Defence revealed that Hilarides, another admiral Thomas Eccles, and a number of those on the Commonwealth's Naval Shipbuilding Expert Advisory Panel, were furnishing Canberra with "expert advice on the performance of the naval shipbuilding exercise. This includes the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines and other issues relevant to naval acquisition and sustainment."

What is also unsettling is that Stephen Johnson, one of the US admiral advisory set, unbeknownst to the Australian public, also served as a deputy secretary of defence for Canberra for two years. With such a level of involvement, it is only a matter of time before the entire complement of the ADF is signed over to Washington, if it already hasn't been done so [over a game of golf](#).

In documents supplied to Congress by the Pentagon in March, the outsourcing picture comes increasingly clotted. Retired Admiral John Richardson makes an appearance, [having received US\\$5,000 a day](#) as a contracted part-time consultant with the Australian Defence Department.

Another figure who has made an appearance in this busy outsourcing circuit is former US Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper. (What is Australia becoming: a retirement village for servants of the US defence-security-intelligence complex?) The Australian National University [has made a habit](#) of hosting Clapper at the ANU National Security College to discuss, among other things, "key global and national security issues including the future of Australia's alliance with the United States."

Clapper's academic waltz through the corridors of power has involved discussions "with policy makers and security practitioners, as well as academics, students and private sector partners in the College's work on issues such as cyber security and analysing future strategic challenges."

The Pentagon documents also reveal that Clapper received, in 2018, an undisclosed sum for services performed for the Office of National Intelligence (ONI) in Canberra. Only the previous year, the decision by the Turnbull government to create the ONI as "a single point of intelligence coordination" [was praised](#) by Clapper as bringing Australia more into line with the other Five Eyes partners.

We can only hope that Clapper has not imparted too much knowledge upon the unwary. His record as DNI was filled with a number of injudicious howlers. In March 2013, [he falsely testified](#) before the Senate Intelligence Committee that the government does "not wittingly" collect the telephone records of millions of Americans. "There are cases where they could, inadvertently perhaps, collect - but not wittingly," he stated in response to a question posed by Senator Ron Wyden.

Within a matter of months, it became clear that such a statement was false, notably in light of the revelations from former defence contractor Edward Snowden. The *New York Times* [was emphatic](#): Clapper had "lied to Congress". In his withering [critique](#) of Clapper, Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul suggested that the intelligence community had engaged in "great abuses". Perhaps, he proposed, both Snowden and Clapper might serve time "in a prison cell together" to further enlighten the country "over what we should and shouldn't do."

In 2019, Clapper did his Pontius Pilate act on CNN, [claiming](#) that he did not lie so much as make "a big mistake". He "just simply didn't understand" what he was being asked. "I

thought of another surveillance program, section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, when I was asked about Section 215 of the Patriot Act at the time”.

His credibility suitably shot, Clapper is still given to making rich offerings of tainted advice. He is manic about Moscow’s electoral interference, going so far [as to tell](#) NBC’s Chuck Todd in May 2017 that the Russians were “typically ... almost genetically driven to co-opt, penetrate, gain favour, whatever”. With such xenophobic opinions, he must be a fabulous guest in Australia’s isolated capital.

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