

US Vice President Mike Pence in Australia

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*Vassal visiting time, and the next slot in the US imperium tourism schedule was one of America's more cosy allies, Australia. The US **Vice President Mike Pence** popped in to keep an eye on matters just to make sure that all was in order.*

There had been that issue of the notable phone call, when Australian **Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull** had been verbally slapped by The Donald over the “dumb” refugee resettlement deal made with the previous Obama administration.

Not to fear. Turnbull and **Foreign Minister Julie Bishop** came across as caddies willing to do their best for Pence (a US vice president deserves two such officials for this sort of visit). Chuckling, everything seemed to be going accordingly.



That said, Pence did not hide his irritation at a few matters on the meeting agenda, including the refugee agreement made by the Obama administration with Turnbull.

“President Trump has made it clear that we’ll honour the agreement, but it doesn’t mean we admire the agreement.”

As watchers of the refugee news items know, Australia responds to asylum seekers and refugees like an insecure spouse feeling that his assets might be pinched.

The result is usually a practiced irrationalism, in this instance involving the transfer of up to 1,250 refugees in offshore detention centres on Nauru and Manus Island to the United States, in exchange for refugees from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

Pence did, however, promise Australia a range of treats, one of them being direct benefits arising from President Trump’s new tax plan. In true Trump fashion, Pence met with various corporate groups, Westfield, Macquarie Group, Lendlease, and Austral, to promise pie-in-the-sky benefits amounting to \$1.5 trillion. (Another figure, another speculation.)

The shower of meaningless rhetoric was heavy.

“The truth is that a stronger American economy also means a stronger economy for all our trading partners, including Australia.”[1] The tax reform on the table “will make the strongest economy in the world stronger still, and it will benefit the American people, American workers, and it will benefit the economy of Australia.”

Such words ring hollow given that the Australian-US Free Trade Agreement has done much

to benefit US economic interests disproportionately to Australia's. Despite projections of an economic nirvana by policy wonks in Canberra, the deal has actually deprived and distorted Australian gains.

The economic promises were merely one feature of the utopian cake being dished up by Pence.

Australia remains a convenient base to watch over matters in the Pacific, be it through military or intelligence operations. That very fact makes Australia both accessory and target in any future conflict in the region.

Never deemed a military occupation, let alone having the vestiges of a military base, Australian officials have opened their doors to the Lean Green Killing Machine on a rotational basis, a policy that began in 2011. Whether this is part of Obama's pivot, or Trump's strategic grope, it all amounts to the same thing: this continental military operation is open for business.

Pence's visit coincides with another rotational round for the US marines in Darwin, located in the tropical north of the continent. The group, comprising 1,250 personnel, have been particularly busy on the public relations blower.

The soldiers have been instructed to make small talk with the local press, and fraternising is to be encouraged - within limits. Like anthropologists, they are to observe the local population and note their "customs," though experience tells us that these observations tend to go destructively awry.

Even Facebook hosts a Marine Rotational Force Darwin page to provide decent filtered comments about the US role in shielding Australia from foreign wickedness. Residents await the arrival of the heroes; weather, boring, tedious, endlessly warm weather, is noted. Welcome to the Australian autumn!



What, then, of the wickedness these Green Mighty Men are defending Australia against? It might take the form of **Kim Jong-un's** vain boast of long range weapons, which goes to show that projecting fear is far better than knowing facts.

Such pop fantasies of nuclear cataclysm doesn't deter the Lowy Institute's director of International Security, **Euan Graham**, from suggesting that North Korea would probably be able to construct a ballistic missile that would be able to reach the Australian mainland "within the life of the Trump administration." [2]

Even a threat at shooting blanks by the man child in a boiler suit concerns the Australian ministries in Canberra. As long as they come from "rogues", that is all that matters. Even more stinging was the North Korean leader's rather accurate statement that Australia had

been “blindly and zealously toeing the US line”.

The Marines in Darwin have been duly briefed, and the officers are insisting that they are ready should Pyongyang misbehave.

“Any time a Marine force is forward deployed, we’re always on standby for anything. We stand ready to fight and win the night, always,” claimed **Lt. Col. Brian Middleton**, commanding officer of the 3rd Battalion of the 4th Marines. How utterly reassuring that must be.

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Notes

[1]<http://www.afr.com/news/donald-trumps-massive-tax-plan-to-benefit-australia-says-mike-pence-20170423-gvqjcz>

[2]<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/grim-warning-on-north-korea-missile-threat-as-julie-bishop-blasts-regime-20170423-gvqo4g.html>

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