

## Former Oz PM denounces current slavish attitude to criminal U.S.

by Robert Manne via lex - The Age *Sunday, Apr 27 2014, 12:08pm*

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### Malcolm Fraser: An unlikely radical

Hated by progressives for his role in Gough Whitlam's [CIA instigated] dismissal and his ultra-conservative foreign policies as Liberal PM, Malcolm Fraser today believes Australia should cut all military ties to the US.



**Malcolm Fraser (left) with perpetually reviled John 'CIA facilitator' Kerr**

Everyone is familiar with the political movement of youthful leftists to the right. The alternative drift - of conservatives to the left - is far less common. As I read Malcolm Fraser's new book on Australian foreign policy, *Dangerous Allies*, which advocates nothing less than the end of the Australia's military alliance with the United States, the career of the towering 19th-century British Liberal, William Gladstone, came to mind.

Gladstone began his political life arguing that the great parliamentary Reform Act of 1832 "threatened to change the form of the British government and ultimately to break up the whole frame of society". He ended it, more than half a century later, almost tearing his party and his country apart by his determination to end the centuries-long British oppression of Ireland. Fraser's political metamorphosis has been no less dramatic.

When Fraser lost the prime ministership in 1983, he had few friends on either the right or left of politics. The right spoke contemptuously of Fraser's failure to introduce the deregulatory and supposedly small-government policies associated with the neo-liberal revolution pioneered by his fellow conservatives, Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. As the Fraser government had taken power several years before either Thatcher or Reagan, the right was effectively accusing him of failure to be wise (or perhaps unwise) not after but before the event.

The left's hostility to Fraser was simpler. Fraser could not be forgiven for the role he'd played in the "coup" of November 11, 1975: governor-general John Kerr's dismissal of the Whitlam government. Nor could he be forgiven for defending the US war in Vietnam or, especially after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, for reinstating in Australia the hardline, US-led, anti-communist policies of what became known as the Second Cold War.

But in the second half of 1990s, something strange began to happen to Fraser. As the centre of gravity of Australian politics moved rightwards under the Howard government, Fraser became

associated with values and policies of the left. The most conspicuous early examples occurred in the areas of ethnicity and race. Fraser strongly supported the movement towards reconciliation with indigenous Australians that the Howard government subverted. He stood firmly against the attack on Asian migration and multiculturalism of Pauline Hanson's One Nation party. And he opposed the cruelty of Australia's asylum-seeker policies: indefinite mandatory detention and then the so-called Pacific Solution, tow-backs to Indonesia and offshore processing on Nauru and Manus Island. Somewhat less conspicuously, he also began to question the foreign policy trajectory of the US and its super-loyal ally, Australia, following the end of the Cold War: NATO's bombing of Serbia, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the licence given to acts of dubious legality in the war on terror.

Fraser customarily explains his movement from right to left by arguing it is Australia and the world that have changed, and not he. Concerning matters of racial equality, this is probably correct. By the early 1960s, at a time when his leader, Robert Menzies, openly sympathised with white South Africa, Fraser was notable within the Liberal Party as a principled opponent of apartheid. As prime minister, Fraser's government championed multiculturalism and brought tens of thousands of Indo-Chinese refugees to Australia.

Concerning America's international behaviour and Australian foreign policy, however, the idea of the world's change and Fraser's continuity of conviction is less credible. As minister for the army and then defence in the late 1960s, Fraser was as committed to the American alliance and to the Vietnam War as any member of the Liberal Party. As prime minister, no Western leader responded with greater alarm to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Fraser told journalists that the world might be at war within days. In Washington, he tried to convince the Americans to establish a new naval base at Fremantle and later accepted the idea of Darwin as an airbase for US B-52 bombers.

Fraser's foreign policy thinking shifted fundamentally, although gradually, at the end of the Cold War. In an interview in 1994 he still defended the Vietnam War as "right", adding that "failing in an enterprise does not make the attempt dishonourable or wrong". Later, he came to think of it as a disaster. More generally, Fraser, the most pro-American of all Australia's leaders during the latter stages of the Cold War, began to question, with a critique no less withering than that of his former enemies on the left, the character of almost every aspect of America's international behaviour: its narcissistic self-image as the light unto the world, its imperial arrogance, its systematic abuse of military power.

All this eventually brought him to question aspects of the political culture of Australia. In 1994, Fraser still described the criticism of Australia as a dependent nation as "ludicrous" and a symptom of a "massive inferiority complex". "Australia has never lacked a sense of independence," he said. "I don't know how ignorant of Australian history people can be."

Perhaps because of the unprecedented pro-American sycophancy of the Howard government following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Fraser altogether changed his mind. He came to believe that a long-standing, deep-seated and self-crippling "craving" for dependency on a great and powerful friend is to be found at the very heart of what he calls Australia's "national psyche".

A diagnosis of the roots of that national psyche, and its consequences for the future of his country, form the subject of *Dangerous Allies*. Last month, I spent two afternoons in his Melbourne city office, discussing with Malcolm Fraser the most radical book ever to have been written by a former Australian prime minister.

I begin by suggesting his book would be welcomed by the team at *The Australian*. Although we chuckle, both of us realise there is a very serious issue here. Because of the uncritically pro-

American bias of the US corporation that owns almost 70 per cent of the metropolitan press in Australia, we have lost the capacity to debate some of the most serious issues concerning our future. Fraser recalls the time when Menzies bewailed US ownership of four provincial radio stations.

He knows, of course, that his book will be controversial. His publishers had approached the former Labor foreign minister Gareth Evans for a commendation. On the cover we learn that Evans believes the book represents "a major contribution to the debate Australia has to have". Fraser tells me that while Evans supports a less supine Australian foreign policy, he disagrees with Fraser's advocacy of the end of the US military alliance.

I ask Fraser whether he had begun his research with that argument in mind. He had not. It was the facts and logic of the situation that led him to this conclusion. Between the present military alliance and full independence, he could find no "halfway house".

For Fraser, the roots of the national psyche of dependency began before Federation. The federal fathers looked to the Royal Navy for protection. They did not even consider that Australia needed to form its own foreign policy. Our relations with the world were to be managed from London; our relations with London through the Colonial Office. At most, Australian patriots like Alfred Deakin sought to enhance Australia's influence within the formal structures of the Empire.

It was a hopeless cause. Fraser quotes the prophetic warning of early 20th century High Court justice Henry Bourne Higgins that the price for British protection would be paid by Australian soldiers sent unquestioningly to fight in imperial wars. He is dismayed that Gallipoli has become Australia's sacred soil; nations ought not to feel the need to be born in blood. Rather, the progressive social legislation that once made Australia "the working man's paradise" would provide a sounder myth of foundation. I ask Fraser whether as PM he had visited Gallipoli. No, he had not: "People would have said Fraser is wasting his time."

Fraser did not find any British Empire policy that Australian politicians had influenced either before or after World War I. Only one Australian prime minister, Billy Hughes - in Fraser's view, our worst-managed to throw his weight around successfully, mainly in a harmful manner, like demanding the removal of a racial equality clause from the League of Nations preamble. Australia at first declined the offer of independence in 1931 under the Statute of Westminster; conservative politicians feared that it might dilute Britain's commitment to defend Australia.

I tell Fraser a story he has not heard before. In 1939, the Australian deputy high commissioner in London was accidentally sent the minutes of a chiefs-of-staff meeting that made it clear that if trouble arose in Europe and the Pacific, Britain might not be able to send a fleet to the Pacific to fight the Japanese. The deputy high commissioner was begged not to send the minutes to Canberra. Astonishingly, he agreed. In any other context, this would have been regarded as treason - the unsent information provided the key to the future security of Australia. Fraser's ears prick. I ask him whether he is disquieted by the wording of Menzies' announcement in September 1939 that because Britain had declared war on Germany, "as a result" Australia was also at war. "Oh, you've got to be. You've got to be."

During World War II, Australia began its move from dependency on Britain to dependency on the US. There was only one moment when an alternative history was possible - Dr H. V. Evatt's foreign policy leadership under the Labor government of Ben Chifley. Evatt, one of the architects of the United Nations, thought of Australia as an independent Western middle power, and though he has long been pilloried by conservatives of Fraser's generation, he is the unlikely hero of Dangerous Allies. I ask Fraser what killed off the kind of future for Australia imagined by Evatt. Although Fraser

doesn't believe that Menzies, in so many ways a man of the past, was blameless, he thinks the main explanation lies with the coming of the Cold War.

There is a contradiction in Fraser's current view of the Cold War. In general, he praises the US policy of containment. The Soviet Union truly was what the Cold War warriors claimed - an aggressive and expansionist power. In particular, however, he is now deeply critical of several American actions he once enthusiastically supported. In Vietnam, he now believes, the Americans did not understand that the communist movement was the bearer of the nationalist idea. They did not understand the geopolitical implication of the Sino-Soviet dispute; that communism was no longer "monolithic". Much of the US's behaviour was lawless, like the assassination of the South Vietnamese president Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963, and its leaders systematically ignored the pessimistic CIA analyses showing that victory in Vietnam was increasingly unlikely.

Australia was complicit in the Vietnam folly. We were keen to involve America in the western Pacific. We did not realise the irrelevancy of our encouragement. Great powers, Fraser insists, invariably follow self-interest. He now describes Australia's slavish support for America in Vietnam as a "case study of the perils of blind strategic dependence". He is only slightly less critical of the American and Australian response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, where military support for a floundering Marxist government was interpreted as a bid for world power.

Fraser was minister for the army and later defence minister during the Vietnam War, and the highly excitable prime minister at the time of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Although he is not temperamentally inclined to breast-beating, his reappraisal of US and Australian Cold War behaviour over Vietnam and Afghanistan also involves open and unambiguous self-criticism, a quality of character not to be found in any postwar Australian PM before or after him.

This quality matters. Fraser joined the Menzies ministry at the time of one of the greatest political catastrophes of the 20th century, the brutal mid-1960s massacre of perhaps one million Indonesian communists, leftists and Chinese. I raise this question with him. Fraser doubts that accurate intelligence on the massacre reached Australia. But he does not doubt the reason why. After the Indonesian Army came to power, there was in Australia "a sigh of relief ... don't look too closely at how it happened". Unlike many other anti-communists of his (and my) generation, he has no desire to defend the indefensible. Indeed, in our conversation, he turns to other instances of wilful blindness. Cold War warriors did not want to know that before Fidel Castro came to power in 1959, Cuba had been ruled by "a tyrannical dictator in bed with big business". Why, in 1973, did they feel the need to rid themselves of Chilean president Salvador Allende, a left-wing social democrat? Once self-criticism begins, it is difficult to know where it will lead or when it will stop.

Fraser tells me he was once convinced the swift and peaceable end of the Cold War would create a better world. Ruefully, he concedes he then did not believe it possible that the hope of a new world order powerfully articulated in March 1991 by George Bush snr - of international co-operation under the rule of law - would be so swiftly and comprehensively squandered.

Why did this happen? Fraser places most of the blame on the post-Cold War leadership of the sole remaining superpower, the US. Bill Clinton had no feel for foreign policy. At the end of the Cold War, having served its purpose, NATO should have been wound up. Fraser is bitterly critical of the war of humanitarian intervention fought by NATO over Kosovo: its support for the terrorist Kosovo Liberation Army; its prolonged bombing of civilians in Serbia; its signing of a treaty, the Kumanovo Agreement, it had no intention of fulfilling. Even though *Dangerous Allies* was written before the present crisis over Crimea, it contains a prophetic passage about the dangers of Clinton's expansion of NATO eastwards to the borderlands of Russia.

The rise of the neo-conservatives in Washington during the 1990s was, however, an even more important catalyst for Fraser's journey from former Cold War warrior to Australia's most prominent critic of US imperialism. These people are, he tells me, true believers in some of the oldest and most dangerous tendencies in American thought: American "self-righteousness" and "exceptionalism"; the existence of a God-given "manifest destiny" to bring redemption to the world. He explains the potential perils of the neo-con world view like this: in the same way that Stalin believed the USSR would not be safe until democracy was destroyed, the neo-cons believe the US will not be safe until democracy is universally triumphant. They have no understanding of the madness of their ambition. They vastly overestimate the political efficacy of military power. They are extraordinarily ignorant of other cultures.

After 9/11, the neo-cons were critical to George W. Bush's decision to invade Afghanistan and Iraq and to hand to the US president geographically and chronologically unlimited war powers, including the right to unleash drone attacks on people living in countries with whom America was not at war. In *Dangerous Allies*, Fraser describes drones as "the weapons of terrorists". I ask Fraser whether he believes the influence of the neo-cons passed with the 2008 election of Barack Obama or whether it remains in the ether of Washington. "In the ether," he replies.

Fraser is alarmed about the American response to the rise of China. One half of their policy invites economic co-operation; the other half - the so-called pivot into the western Pacific - suggests a renewed round of military containment. The Chinese he meets tell him they are puzzled. Fraser believes a new policy of containment is wrong and dangerous. Unlike the expansionist Soviet Union, the Chinese pose no military threat. Their energy is absorbed in economic growth. They rely as greatly as the Americans on the freedom of the oceans. They have always opposed what they call great-power "hegemonism".

The US, however, cannot abandon the expectation of "supremacy" across the globe, including in the western Pacific. North-east Asia is becoming increasingly unstable. The greatest danger, in Fraser's view, is a clash, beginning perhaps over disputed territories, between China and an increasingly militaristic Japan with nuclear capacity and supported by its ally, the US. In such circumstances, what should Australia do?

This brings us to the reason he wrote this book. Fraser is appalled by the trajectory of Australian foreign policy since the end of the Cold War, beginning under Howard but extended under Labor. "The policy of dependence has got worse since the breakup of the Soviet Union," he tells me. "We're more dependent on America today than we ever were on Britain, and more dependent on America today than we ever were during the Cold War." Why so? He believes the answer lies in the intimacy of our contemporary military relations.

Fraser cites four examples. In 2012, a serving Australian officer, Major General Rick Burr, was appointed as Deputy Commander of the 60,000 strong US Pacific Army. Few Australians even know. At present, HMAS Sydney spends several months each year sailing with the US Navy's Seventh Fleet, including in the waters of north-east Asia. In 2011, President Obama announced that Darwin would become a US Army base; Fraser tells me that it was "an absolute disgrace" that this momentous decision was scarcely debated in Australia. He also thinks it disgraceful that we allowed President Obama to announce the US decision for its pivot into the western Pacific while on Australian soil. This symbolises for him the willing abdication not only of our independence but, more deeply, of our sovereignty.

Most important for Fraser, however, is the US communications base at Pine Gap. During his time as prime minister, Pine Gap was used exclusively for surveillance. As a result of technological change,

it is now an integral part of the US "offensive war machine". Pine Gap would be used, he believes, to target China's nuclear arsenal in case of war. It presently provides information for the drone strikes killing Islamist fighters (and unlucky bystanders) in the "war on terror".

This leads Fraser to his conclusion that, given the current US-Australian military relationship, we will inevitably become part of any military action in our region that involves the US, no matter what our government might think or wish to do. According to Fraser, we have arrived at a fundamental paradox. Traditionally, we looked to great and powerful friends for protection. At present, the only national security threat we face arises from the nature of our military relations with one of these great and powerful friends, relations that have developed as a consequence of an unthinking policy based on instinct and drift.

Fraser expresses the essence of his policy recommendation in these words: "To make sure that America does not have a capacity to force Australia into a war which we should well and truly keep out of."

What then should be done? Fraser thinks we should at once withdraw our commander from serving with the US Pacific Army and stop HMAS Sydney from sailing with the Seventh Fleet. We should inform the US that within a year the Darwin military base will be closed down, and that within five years the communications base at Pine Gap will follow.

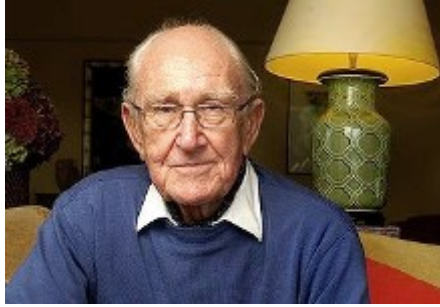
What would be the consequences of such radical acts? Would we miss the kind of signals intelligence we now receive as part of the "five eyes" agreement struck at the end of World War II? Fraser tells me that he cannot think of one major decision his government had taken as a consequence of signals intelligence from the US. In jest, I remind him of the American intelligence that led the Howard government into the invasion of Iraq. "Well, it was all a lie."

What about the protection provided by the ANZUS Treaty? Fraser thinks ANZUS was never more than an agreement to consult in time of military danger. The US would never support Australia in a conflict with Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim state. Great powers do not reward loyalty; that is the abiding illusion on which our defence policy has been based for more than a century. The US will do whatever is in its interests.

As a close and trusted ally, might we not be able, as ANU academic Hugh White suggests, to influence the dangerous drift of the US's China policy? Fraser is sure our words will fall on deaf ears. The US, in his experience, has no capacity to listen to other countries. Indeed the only thing that might give Washington pause for thought, he tells me, is if we withdrew from the military alliance.

Our conversations are over. I mention to Fraser the comparison with Gladstone that has come to mind. He reminds me that Gladstone retired as prime minister when he was 84, the age he will reach next year. After three hours of intense conversation, Fraser seems as full of energy and good humour as when we began.

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***Malcolm Fraser today***

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/people/malcolm-fraser-an-unlikely-radical-20140421-36ze8.html>

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Jungle Drum Prose/Poetry. <http://jungledrum.lingama.net/news/story-1110.html>