

Collision Course

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Other options for nuclear submarines should be considered

In 1969 (former SA Federal MP) Bert Kelly was sacked as Minister for the Navy following the collision of HMAS Melbourne and USS Frank E Evans.

It appears we are once again on a collision course with the US, this time over big cuts to our defence spending. It's been suggested we're not pulling our weight reverting to our old ways of relying on 'great and powerful friends'. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is here to discuss the matter.

Investing in nuclear powered submarines would certainly alleviate her concerns however instead of immediately trying to politicise the issue, it might be more helpful if SA Premier Jay Weatherill took a leaf out of Bert Kelly's book and took a more bi-partisanship approach. Real debate, Bert used to say, was party-neutral.

Opportunities abound in this area. The UK for example has just announced a massive new investment in submarine construction. Why couldn't Australia consider a joint venture with the UK to build our first submarines in the UK with inclusion of our own (SA) labour force on a rotational basis?

The opportunity to lower cost, ensure the latest technology and build our domestic skills capacity so we could eventually build them here would all be enhanced by a joint venture. This would benefit both Australia and the UK (or US if that was the preferred option).

Further, given its strategic importance and role, it should be asked whether this proposed new submarine warfare capability should remain within the Royal Australian Navy or become a fourth Service in our defence force.

This is all too important for political point-scoring.

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