Opposition Leader, Terry Mills, has welcomed today's announcement that the United States plans to expand its military presence in the Northern Territory.

"The announcement by President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Julia Gillard signals the start of a new era in Australia’s relationship with the United States and the Territory’s role in the Asia-Pacific region,” Mr Mills said.

"The increased deployments will provide a significant economic benefit for the Northern Territory and advances the strategic importance of the nation’s Top End and its capital city, Darwin.

"This has short, medium and long-term strategic planning implications for the Territory and the Country Liberals’ proposed Strategic Planning Commission would position us to maximise the opportunities that will flow from this decision.

"The announcement means up to 2500 US Marines will be deployed in Australia for six months a year – starting with deployments of up to 250 marines by the middle of 2012.

"The Marines will conduct exercises at Mt Bundy, Bradshaw and Delamere bases – in some cases independently of Australian personnel.

"Today's announcement also flags an expanded US air presence at RAAF Base Tindal.

"The increased United States role ratchets up the Territory’s capacity to respond to any humanitarian crisis in the Asia Pacific Region – a role we already perform through the National Trauma Centre at Royal Darwin Hospital.

"The increased United States presence will have a significant impact on the Northern Territory for many years to come.”

Further comment: Terry Mills 0418 833 594