“President Barack Obama’s visit to Darwin highlights the strategic importance of the Territory in a growth region,” says Opposition Leader, Terry Mills.

“The US decision to shift attention to the Asia Pacific region is the strongest evidence to date of a changing world.

“The geopolitical centre is moving closer to us and we need to recognise, understand and respond in order to manage well and maximise opportunity.

“Australia is a unique nation in the Asia region; a western democracy, resource rich, affluent and political stable.

“Darwin is closer to Jakarta than Canberra and our proximity makes us much more aware of Asia than other Australians.

“President Obama also has a unique personal connection to our region through Indonesia. He spent four years of his primary schooling in Jakarta and also travelled to Indonesia as an adult to visit his mother, who worked in Indonesia for many years.

“This is in many ways our time, and it’s important we respond to the change and opportunity that flows from this focus on our neighbourhood.

“In recognising this we must respond in a number of ways.

“One of these is best facilitated by the proposed Strategic Planning Commission, which is Country Liberals policy.

“Now more than ever we need to develop a well coordinated and comprehensive planning response to the opportunities that will arise from this geopolitical shift away from Europe to our doorstep.

“Under a Country Liberals government, long term strategic planning will be the first order of business.

“This allows us to respond to change and put us on the strategic front foot in land use, infrastructure, health and education planning for example.

“The US deployment should not change the mutually beneficial economic relationship we have with China – the Territory is open for business – but it does mean we need to develop a far more sophisticated engagement with the
region than we have had until now.

“This means maintaining and growing our strong position with China and also strengthening a multi-level engagement with Indonesia, Japan, Singapore and other regional players.

“A Country Liberals government will set a new standard in Asian relations befitting the changing economic and political dynamic in our region. My aim is to put the Northern Territory into a nation leading position in key aspects of regional engagement.

“Details of our Asian Relations policy will be announced in the New Year.”

Further comment: Terry Mills 0418 833 594