

Bevan Ramsden

Armed Neutrality: an alternative, principled defence policy to safeguard an independent Australia, keep us out of wars and promote peace

Australia's current defence policy, based as it is on dependence upon a foreign power, is rooted in a lack of self-confidence and fear that we haven't the capabilities and numbers to face military threats on our own. The ANZUS Treaty, concluded in 1952 between the U.S, Australia and New Zealand, supposedly gave Australia an assurance that the U.S. would come to our rescue in time of need. The Treaty did not actually give any such guarantee, as many writers have pointed out, but only; "bound the signatories to recognise that an armed attack in the Pacific area on any of them would endanger the peace and safety of the others". It further stated that: 'The Parties will consult together whenever in the opinion of any of them the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened in the Pacific'. The three signatory nations also pledged to maintain and develop individual and collective capabilities to resist attack.

The ANZUS Treaty reinforced in the Australian political and military elite a belief that to ensure the United States would indeed "come to our rescue in time of need", Australia should constantly ingratiate itself with the U.S, reflexively support its foreign policies and participate in its wars, irrespective of their morality or whether there was any real threat to Australia, as an 'insurance premium'. This slavish obedience to the U.S has resulted in Australian soldiers lives being sacrificed in U.S wars of aggression such as those in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, countries which posed no military threat to Australia or the U.S and were not in the ANZUS Treaty geographical commitment area of the Pacific. These wars did not have the sanction of the United Nations and were therefore illegal. They have caused immense devastation to the people and civil infrastructure of the countries invaded, with millions of lives lost and millions more forced to flee as refugees. In another shameful blot on our national conscience (if we have one), when some of these refugees tried to find a new and peaceful life in Australia, our governments locked them up in 'detention centre' gaols, often with no indication of when they might be released or where they might be sent.

To further ingratiate itself with the U.S, in the 1960's our then-government allowed the U.S. to set up military bases in Australia such as Pine Gap Satellite Communications Station near Alice Springs and the North-West Cape nuclear submarine communications station in WA, both of which are crucial elements of U.S war fighting capability. In 2014 the Force Posture Agreement was concluded between Australia and the United States, allowing up to 2,500 U.S. marines to be stationed in Darwin under the U.S Indo-Pacific Command and to take part with the ADF in annual war games. This agreement also gives the U.S military and its contractors unimpeded access to our airports, seaports, RAN and RAAF bases.

The policy of dependence on the U.S has resulted in loss of our national sovereignty and means that enemies of the United States automatically become enemies of Australia, making us less, not more, safe. It also makes us complicit in the war crimes resulting from U.S wars of aggression. In the eyes of our regional neighbours we are increasingly seen not as a peaceful country and a good neighbour but as the lackey of an arrogant, aggressive U.S superpower.

Has the ANZUS treaty really saved us from any military threats? The short answer is NO. In the 69 years since it was signed no real military threat directed at Australia has emerged.

We would have been quite safe without it and would not have been dragged into disastrous U.S wars of aggression against countries in our region which posed no threat to us.

So shouldn't we be asking: "Are there alternatives?" Could we adopt an alternative defence policy which would not involve a military alliance with a major power and which would enable us to defend ourselves while allowing us to pursue peaceful and mutually beneficial relations with our neighbours and keeping us out of needless wars?

Dr Albert Palazzo is the Director of War Studies in the Australian Army Research Centre, which is a part of the Australian Army Headquarters. In a paper published in 2018 he argues that; "The era of Australian dependency on a great power partner as a security policy is coming to an end and that of armed neutrality is beckoning.....What is unfolding is an oft told tale, one that has been played out many times in human history, of a rising power's challenge to the existing order that the established power had created. It is a completely normal and predictable outcome of the shift in the power balance between China and the United States, one that is moving in China's favour.....This paper has two objectives. The title identifies the first – to advance armed neutrality as the most suitable security policy to manage future risks..... Australia's future security policy will need to accommodate the challenges of China and of climate change.....Either of these threats on their own would be sufficient to necessitate a re-examination of Australia's security policy. Together they mandate it.....The challenge for Australia's leaders is that they must find a solution that addresses both China and climate change....To support armed neutrality's advancement as Australia's future security policy, this paper will consider a number of other popular options. They are, continued dependence; going nuclear and doing nothing. The paper will then make the case for armed neutrality"

In 1984 the late David Martin wrote a scholarly and comprehensive work entitled "Armed Neutrality for Australia". He collaborated in the writing of this book with a range of defence, academic, diplomatic and military experts, both from Australia and overseas.

I quote from his introduction:

"A healthy nation, confident in itself, manages its affairs in conformity with its long term interests. It will seek to fashion policies to ensure its survival as a free, prosperous and peaceful community, taking account of its physical location and the quality and quantity of its human and material resources. It will also respect the legitimate aspirations of other nations. This book aims to show that the best policy for Australia is armed neutrality. It accords with our needs and our geographical position. Shaped to our means, it would be viable both morally and in practice. It would let us establish stable and mutually beneficial relations with other countries, especially our neighbours. In the words of Thomas Jefferson, during his first inaugural address – "Peace, commerce and honest friendship with all nations; entangling alliances with none". If we can let go the inherited belief that to be safe we need powerful protectors, we shall discover that we are quite able to look after ourselves. This would make us more enterprising and less self-enclosed, because independence promotes not truculence but growth. We are tied to an alliance which, whatever purpose it once served or was supposed to serve, does not help us now and cannot be shaped to do so. It cannot make us secure against such dangers as we may one day have to meet, while it needlessly exposes us to other dangers, including nuclear war."

Is neutrality or armed neutrality practiced by any countries at present?

The answer is yes.

Switzerland, Sweden, Austria, Finland and Ireland practice or have practiced neutrality or armed neutrality in varying degrees.

Neutrality is recognised as a valid legal position by the United Nations, which expects that such a state must not be violated militarily by any belligerents. A neutral state is permitted to defend itself against violation of its independence by a belligerent, hence the term armed neutrality.

Dr Albert Palazzo, in his essay on armed neutrality for Australia, says: "The security policy of armed neutrality is most commonly associated with Switzerland, where it is long-standing practice. As a policy, armed neutrality does not mean military weakness. Instead, it requires a practicing state to be strong enough that it has no need for alliances to provide for its security. Or, as Niccolò Machiavelli phrased it, 'the Swiss are strongly armed and completely free.'"

Switzerland

In Switzerland, armed defence, civil defence and the economy are closely inter-meshed and the entire population is involved in various ways. Military service is compulsory and while conscientious objection is allowed, those who take this position must serve in a non-combatant role to support the national defence effort. David Martin says: "No civilians anywhere in the world are so well protected against the mass destructive effects of war as are the neutral Swiss. They think that an efficient civil defence is necessary to neutrality. It will enable them to resist blackmail and in this way support deterrence. A population, with evidence all around it that the government takes civil defence seriously, will itself take it seriously."

Do the Swiss have to pay heavily for their armed neutrality policy? On the contrary, in 1979 the Swiss spent 1.9% of their GDP on military defence whilst Australia in the period 1979-80 spent 2.6% on defence.

In 1982-83, the Swiss spent 1.8% of their GDP on military defence whilst in 1981-82 Australia spent 2.9% of GDP. These figures come from David Martin's book.

More recent figures from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) show that the Swiss expenditure on military defence in 2020 was 0.7% of their GDP. Australia's defence spending in 2019-2020 was 2.1% of GDP.

The Swiss spend much less as a proportion of their GDP on military defence than Australia and get independence and peace. By contrast, Australia's defence hardware spending is very much oriented towards the purchase of expensive U.S aircraft and other equipment to ensure integration with their military, thus enabling Australia to take part in their expeditionary wars of aggression. For our defence spending we get involvement in endless U.S wars, not peace.

Sweden

GlobalSecurity.org says: The present policy of Swedish neutrality is not laid down in the Constitution or required by any international agreement. Rather, it is a policy which Sweden itself has chosen to pursue, based on the conviction that neutrality is the best possible guarantee of Sweden's being able to avoid involvement in a future war. This policy is backed by a relatively strong national defence designed to deter or prevent the belligerents in any

military conflict from trying to occupy or use Swedish territory". David Martin in his book comments on Sweden's concept of neutrality as; "non-participation in alliances in peacetime, aiming at neutrality in time of war". He goes on to say that Sweden's neutrality has not prevented them supporting United Nations' peacekeeping forces: "Sweden has sent more soldiers- 40,000 of them-to more United Peace keeping operations than any other country.....Sweden arguably the best armed of all neutrals practices what it calls 'total defence'Rapid mobilisation is all important. Equipment is stored in thousands of scattered depots to which, for greater speed, the call-up would report directly... Sweden practices conscription.. Military service reaches every male between 18 and 47 years of age...Fully mobilised military manpower embraces, as it does in Switzerland, roughly 10% of the population: 800,000 people. Mobilisation would require about 72 hours... Every able-bodied person plays some part in total defence....Every year 20,000 are recruited into civil defence.. About 2 million into economic defence.. Well over half a million women and men belong to voluntary organisations which offer training, often highly specialised, in different tasks within the total effort of national protection.. Almost all defence employees, officers, rankers or civilians belong to trade unions. They have the same rights as other unionists including the right to collective bargaining about salaries...Their right to strike is limited only by security requirements...Labour laws on occupational safety are strictly enforced in all services... Sweden's economic defence embraces nearly the whole industrial and commercial life...It is a maxim of Swedish policy that local production should supply around 90% of military needs."

And what does Sweden's armed neutrality defence policy cost?

The Stockholm International Peace Research institute has graphed Sweden's defence spending as a percentage of its GDP and shows a steady decrease year by year, 1.8% of GDP in the year 2000 dropping to 1.4% of the GDP in 2019. In contrast Australia is currently spending 2.1% of GDP on defence not to keep us neutral and at peace but so that we can be dragged into U.S wars.

David Martin in 'Armed Neutrality for Australia' says about neutrality: "Neutrality, properly so-called, exists only in time of war" and goes on to quote the former Austrian Chancellor Dr Bruno Kreisky on principles to be observed by countries which consistently seek to practise neutrality.

"1. Such a country cannot join military alliances in peacetime. That would destroy its ability to be neutral in time of war.

2. It must allow no foreign military bases on its soil. They would diminish its freedom of action, or rather non-action, in wartime.

3. It must accept no obligations, political economic or other, which would impair its neutrality in wartime."

He goes on to say: "In Articles 1-10 of the Hague Convention of 2907, it is laid down that the territory of a neutral power is inviolable. Belligerents must not move troops, munitions or other war supplies across it..... But a neutral state may resist by all legitimate means, even with force, attempts to violate its neutrality. This would not be a hostile act on its part. Neutrals are not expected to turn the other cheek.....It follows and is generally acknowledged that neutrals, and in particular permanent neutrals, accept as binding that they must be physically prepared to defend their independence- their freedom. This is

inherently part of their neutrality.” And in the words of Dr Renschler, an eminent Swiss jurist: “permanent neutrality stands out for dependability; it should be trusted and can be trusted and may thus be considered a steadying factor in political calculations. It may be looked upon as absolutely reliable.

David Martin asks: “What about moral neutrality- indifference in the face of the many challenges to justice and fair dealing among nations and societies? Nothing like this is asked of neutral states, least of all of their peoples. On the contrary, permanent neutrality demands a high level of internal liberty that only a comparatively free and progressive societies seem capable of it.”

In relation to Australia adopting armed neutrality as its defence policy, Dr Albert Palazzo says: “There is no doubt that in order to adopt armed neutrality the ADF will have to undergo a major transformation. Platforms that are designed to operate within a US naval or air task group, for example, may no longer be practical or even suitable for armed neutrality. The Army’s perception of itself as an infantry-centric force may need to undergo a radical revision, with the status of the gunner moving to the fore as coastal defence again becomes the land force’s primary role. Australia will also need to review its preference for a just-in-time supply chain and greatly increase the scale of holdings in defence warehouses. Lastly, the defence budget will need to grow considerably to accommodate a necessarily larger defence force. In fact, Australia may need to reintroduce national service and develop plans for the mobilisation of the nation in case of threat.’

‘While these adjustments may seem daunting, even radical, there are advantages to adopting armed neutrality, in addition to becoming a nation that is finally responsible for its own sovereignty and ending questions surrounding the future reliability of the United States.’

‘It also will allow Australia to make decisions for itself. If Australia is interested in remaining a sovereign state, a form of armed neutrality provides a way forward.”

For Australia to adopt armed neutrality many questions would be asked. Firstly, have we the resources and is it strategically feasible? David Martin addresses these questions in his book. He says “a common perception is that having a vast coastline and small population, Australia is indefensible”. He goes on to say; ‘Only two or three other countries would be as difficult to invade and hold as Australia. The alleged disadvantages – a lonely island-continent with large empty spaces– are blessings, politically and strategically.”

The Katter Report tabled in November, 1981 by the Defence Sub-Committee of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, commenting on what an invader would need, stated that; “This would require a ground force approximately three times a large as the land force Australia could field against an enemy”. At that time, Australia had a population of 15 million. We now have a population of 25 million.

In 1942, in preparation for a possible Japanese invasion, Australia had one million men under arms, some of these overseas. This included 100,000 in the Volunteer Defence Corp and involved the mobilisation of all able-bodied persons in civil defence occupations. Each State, with Commonwealth Government support, had plans to deny an enemy access and if the enemy gained a foothold to implement a scorched earth policy to deny the enemy of any support and impede its advance. This total defence planning and organisation is detailed in Sue Rosen’s 2017 book, “Scorched Earth-Australia’s Secret Plan for Total War

under Japanese Invasion in WWII". This defence preparation and mobilisation as well as the Australian contribution to the defeat of the Japanese military, appears to have been conveniently forgotten, not being in accord with the current policy of dependence on the United States to "save us" because "we can't save ourselves". U.S President Truman, in a speech to the U.S. Congress after the defeat of Japan, paid tribute to Australia's role in this victory by saying that Australia's contribution, from a population of only 7 million, was approximately equal to that of the United States.

David Martin states; "We now know that, in 1942, the Japanese rejected the idea of descending on Australia because it would have required twelve divisions, one and half million tons of shipping and most of the Imperial navy for protection. An invader would also need to have air superiority over the beaches and route of advance."

In terms of Australia having the material resources and industry to support the defence effort, David Martin paints a very positive picture. Unfortunately, this picture has faded in the four decades since it was written.

Writing in 1980, David Martin writes; "Australia still has the most advanced and variegated industrial complex in her immediate region.....There are gaps in Australia's production and her productive potential but they can be closed. We still make as much steel as India with her huge population. Our automotive industry is numbered among the ten largest. We have a sizable petro-chemical industry, yards capable of building vessels as large as we need and an electronics industry, which, whilst it provides a chink in our armour, could be expanded reasonably quickly..... Australia now produces some 40-45% of the simpler kinds of its defence equipment." He might have added that during WWII Australia's fledgling aircraft industry produced over 2000 state of the art military aircraft, some of them Australian designed, as well as aircraft engines, at a time when we didn't produce motor cars.

Unfortunately, over the past 40 years or so, successive Australian governments have got high on the "privatisation weed" and have been hell-bent on pursuing policies of globalisation, sale of public assets and allowing foreign corporations to control critical industries. This has resulted in Australia's manufacturing capacity declining to the point where we no longer have an aircraft or automotive manufacturing capacity, have little left of our steel production capacity and only two oil refineries still operating. The bulk of our fuel and lubricant supplies must now be imported via long supply routes from Singapore and the Middle East. We don't even manufacture much footwear or clothing. The vulnerability to interdiction of these vital supply routes is one issue which would have to be addressed urgently, should Australia move to a defence policy of armed neutrality. In doing so it would also provide a huge boost to job opportunities for Australians as well as rebuilding the key industry skills which have been lost in the last four decades. In addition, this industry revival would provide the opportunity to move from dependence on fossil fuels to the renewable energy sources which Australia has in super-abundance, thus providing energy security while addressing climate change issues at the same time.

For Australia, moving from the current strategic dependence defence policy to one of continental defence based on self-reliance and neutrality could only be achieved in stages.

The first stage would be a comprehensive plan by government to provide the manufacturing base for a policy of self-defence by rebuilding our strategic manufacturing industries, including a change-over from fossil fuels to renewable energy. In the process many jobs would be created with the government drawing on the innovative potential of

the Australian workforce. Ownership of and control of the new and re-established strategic industries must remain 51% in government hands in the interests of national security.

Secondly, the ADF must be re-structured in order to change from being an expeditionary force integrated in with and subservient to the U.S military to one which is independent and structured for continental defence of Australia based on anti-access/area-denial (A2AD) principles.

Thirdly, An Australian military force re-structured for continental defence would need to draw on a much larger reserve of personnel as well as developing a significant civil defence organisation. Whilst other neutral states have used conscription to this end, that option is not open in Australia. On two occasions, in WWI and during the Vietnam War, Australians have shown a strong aversion to conscription for military service. David Martin, in his book mentioned above, recognised this matter and posed a solution.

He proposes the 'Voluntary Latent Forces System' (VLFS), which he says eschews compulsion but still promises to give us the reserves we need. "The VLFS", he says, "involves a predetermined number of young men and women, including possibly from the existing Army Reserve, being selected each year from volunteers, primarily in the 18-21 years of age group, for training in specific skills, for say, 8 to 12 months. Selection would depend on the demands of their specialities and ranks. They would be contractually bound to remain on active reserve for perhaps five years. They would be recalled for further, short intensive training in major unit exercises every other year or so. In an emergency they would be liable for call up at two week's notice. If the army could attract 20,000 to 30,000 carefully chosen volunteers each year, then after five years it could call out 100,000 to 150,000 to fill out its force structure. Enlistment incentives should be strong. For their initial training, VLFS personnel should be paid enough to finance higher studies or pay a deposit on a home Their training would profit them in their civilian work.... The VLFS system serves total defence and these personnel are placed throughout the community, understand defence needs and can give leadership in meeting them in peace and war."

We should not forget that Australia had one million men under arms in 1942 when the population of Australia was only 7.2 million. We now have a population three times that, 25 million. This means that the provision of a sufficiently large defence force including one based on the VLFS principle, to defend continental Australia and deter any aggressor, is clearly feasible.

The fourth step would require the re-examination of all defence purchases, such as the F35 and the submarines, to determine the defence procurement policies most suited to the continental defence of Australia. We should terminate the contracts for any foreign military purchases not needed for continental defence and manufacture our own equipment as much as possible.

The fifth step in moving towards a policy of neutrality, self-reliance and continental defence would be to adjust, in stages, our military relationship with the United States. All of the base agreements which Australia has with the United States, including that for Pine Gap and the Force Posture Agreement mentioned above, have an exit clause enabling either party to advise the other that it wishes to terminate the agreement. Only one year's notice is required.

The first base agreements to be addressed would be those for Pine Gap and the North West Cape Communications Base. Both of these support the nuclear war capabilities of the United States and so prevent Australia signing the United Nations Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons, because that Treaty requires that its signatories refuse to support in any way the nuclear capabilities of nuclear-armed countries. ICAN has shown that a large majority of Australians want the government to sign that Treaty, so closing those two U.S bases would enable the democratic wishes of the Australian people regarding this treaty to be carried out. It would also serve notice on the U.S that Australia is moving towards an independent defence policy and is confident it can defend the continent without outside assistance. The next step would be giving the U.S one year's notice to terminate the Force Posture Agreement, thus ending the stationing of foreign forces on our soil and the U.S military's open door access to our airports, seaports and military base. The ANZUS Treaty itself would probably be voided by these actions and if Australia didn't opt out, the U.S. would have done so already.

Finally, what would a self-reliant independent continental defence cost us and can we afford it. No one to my knowledge has made such estimates. Frank Palazzo says: "the defence budget will need to grow considerably to accommodate a necessarily larger defence force."

I attach two graphs which have been produced by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) showing the defence expenditures of two countries espousing versions of armed neutrality defence policies. They show initially larger expenditures to establish the infrastructure and trained personnel to implement the policy and a progressive reduction in defence expenditure thereafter. For example, Switzerland's defence expenditure was 2.5% of GDP in 1960 and has progressively declined to 0.7% of GDP in 2020. Sweden's was 3.8% of GDP in 1960 and has progressively declined to 1.3% of GDP in 2020. In comparison Australia's defence expenditure was 3% of GDP in 1960 and is running at 2.1% in 2019-20. A graph from the Parliamentary library is attached showing Australia's defence expenditure. If Frank Palazzo is correct, defence expenditure will have to grow to implement an independent, self-reliant continental defence policy. However, both Switzerland and Sweden show that once established, armed neutrality defence can cost significantly less to maintain as a percentage of GDP than Australia's current defence policy. If concurrently and as part of the implementation of armed neutrality the Australian government revives manufacturing industry, thus delivering nearly full employment, government tax income will also get a significant boost with savings also in the no longer necessary "job seeker" payments, thus generating income to help to pay for the new defence policies.

This submission has not yet addressed the most import issue.

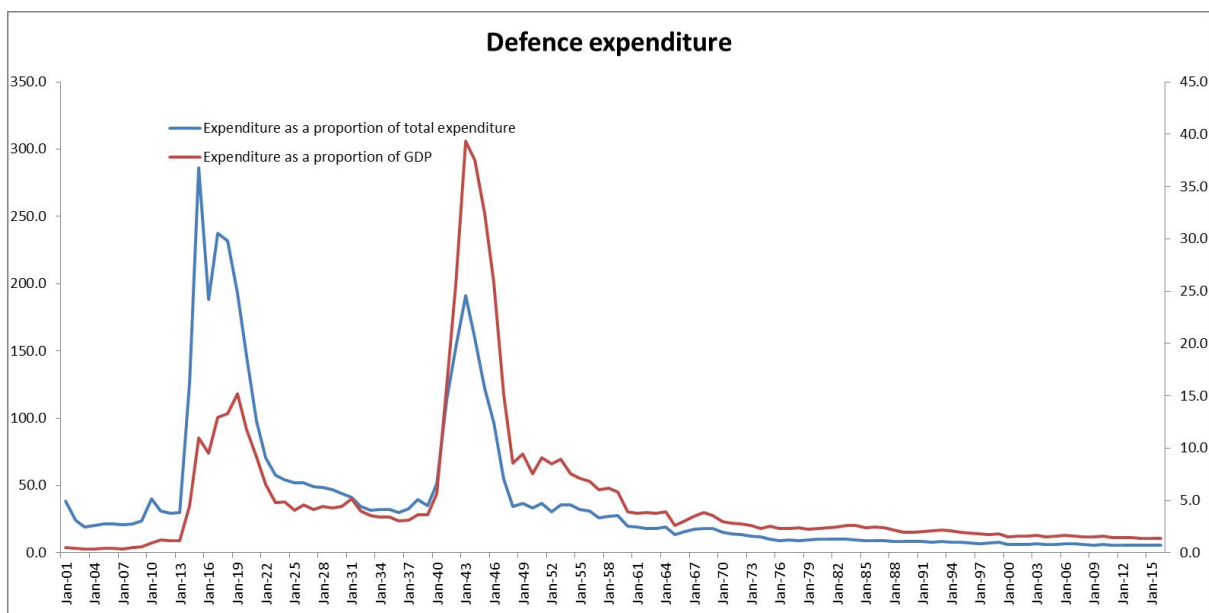
What will provide the motivation for an Australian government to adopt a new direction in Australia's defence policies? Clearly only a very active and determined electorate motivated by the desire to keep Australia out of wars and pursue a policy of peace as an independent nation will produce a government with the strength and direction to respond to such motivation. There is a small but growing movement in the community with this motivation but it is still too small to move the major parties who are totally committed to the policy of strategic dependence on the U.S for defence, along with obsequious acceptance and active promotion of U.S foreign policy objectives.

Will it take a defence crisis to force a re-assessment of defence policy, such as occurred in WWII when the Japanese drove the British out of Singapore and left Australia exposed with no big power protector. The decision to change from dependence on Britain to dependence on the U.S was made swiftly in 1943 by Prime Minister John Curtin.

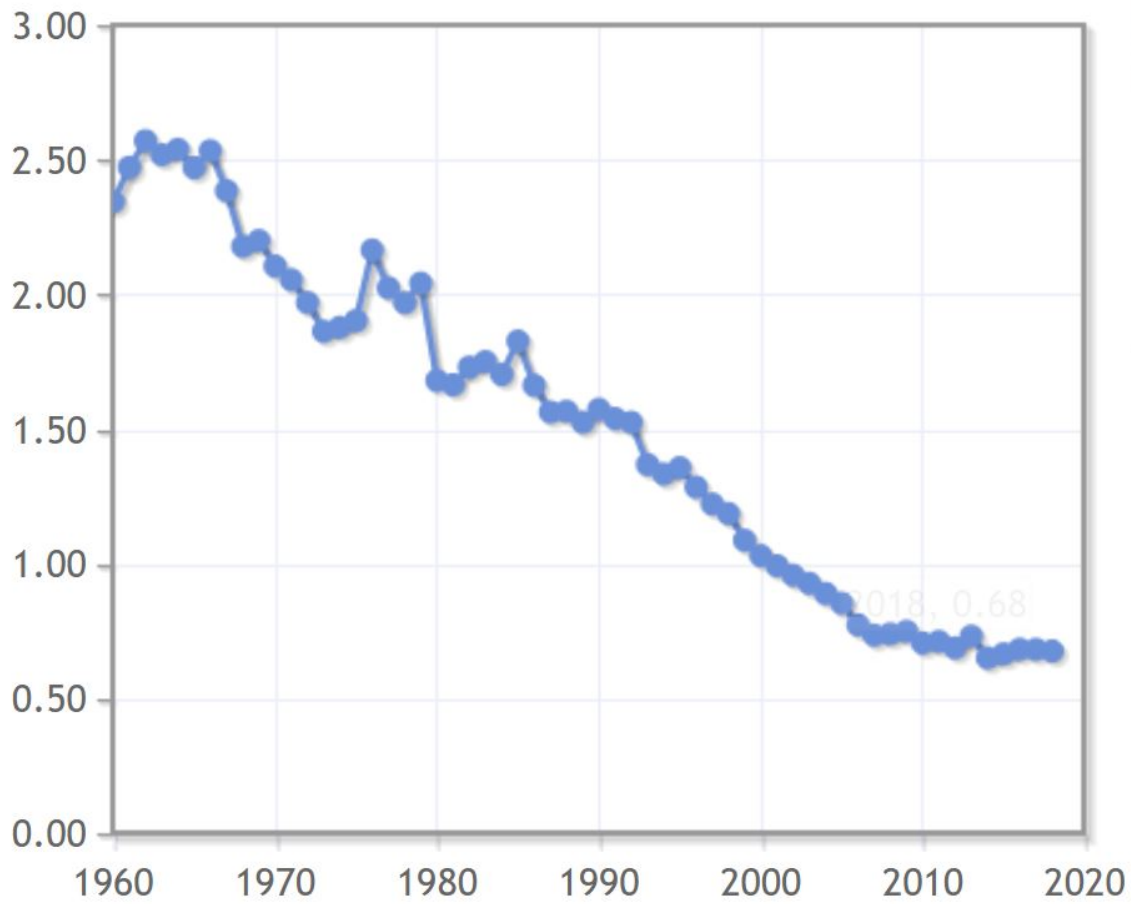
Unthinkable though it is, a war with China could well provide the impetus for a radical re-assessment of our defence dependence on the U.S. This might occur if Australia joins the U.S in a war against China with probable defeat and terrible consequences for Australia, which could include the wrecking of our economy and Chinese missiles taking out Pine Gap and North West Cape. May this prove to be the crisis which tears the blinkers away from the eyes of our political elite exposing the dangers inherent in the close alliance with the U.S and become the sword that severs our relationship with the U.S military. Then, Phoenix-like from the ashes, might emerge the new independent, self-reliant and armed neutral Australia. Not that this is a reason to stand back and let Australia follow the U.S into a war against China. On the contrary we must do all we can to prevent this and in doing so raise the issue of the need for an Australian future based on independence and peace.

Bevan Ramsden

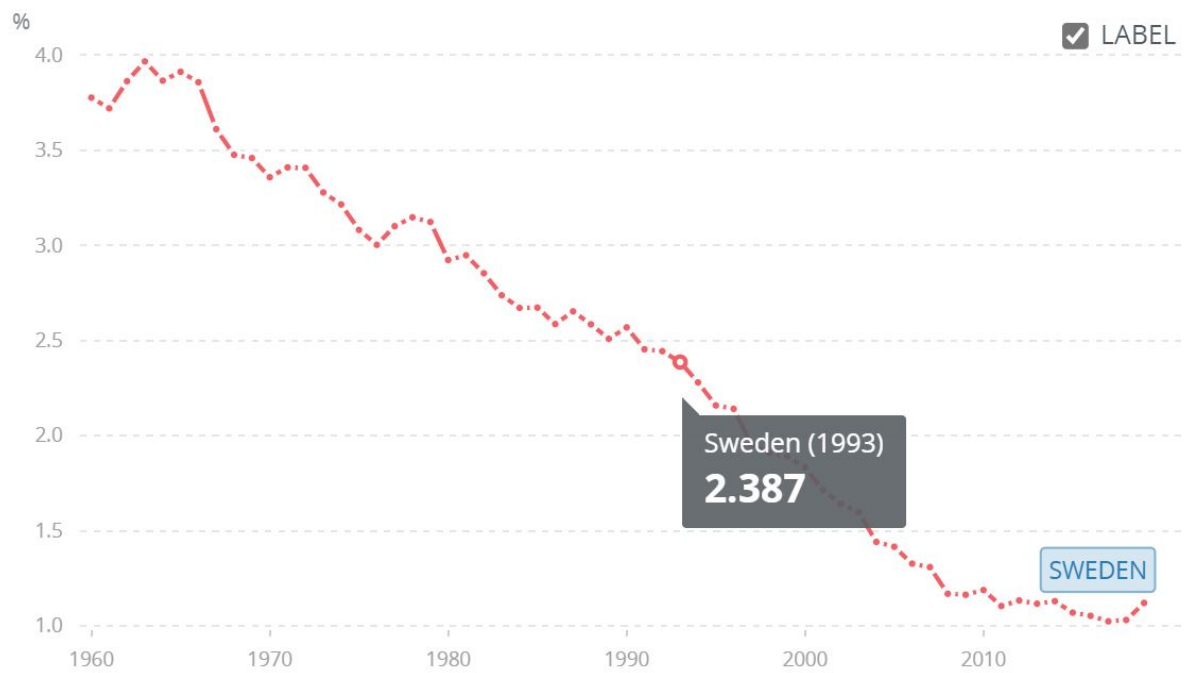
Attached graphs on defence expenditures



**Australia's defence expenditure absolute and as a % of GDP over the decades
(Source: Parliamentary library, published on the Parliamentary web site)**



Switzerland's defence spending under its armed Neutrality policy (SIPRI)



Sweden's defence spending under its armed neutrality policy (SIPRI)