

The Environmental Consequences of the United States-Australia Military Alliance, and Sustainable Defence Through Nonviolent Methods

Introduction

In this submission, I examine some of the manifold deleterious consequences of maintaining the status quo of the Australian military alliance with the United States. The submission firstly examines the environmental damage, resource depletion and climate change impacts occasioned by the militaristic status quo, demonstrating that significant and urgent change is essential if humanity and its host planet are to avoid the worst effects of global warming and the extinctions crisis. The second half of the submission explores nonviolent alternatives to militaristic defence, both historical and potential.

The United States-Australia Military Alliance

It's important to acknowledge the role this alliance has played historically, as well as recognise its benefits and sacrifices, and I count a number of former US and Australian military personnel among my friends. However, new human security threats have emerged in recent years, with that of global warming far outweighing any threats of war. As such, a global and cooperative approach to reducing emissions must take priority to any nationalist or regional defence approaches, however useful these may have been in the past. Below I examine the environmental problems caused by militarism and argue that new, less polluting defence strategies are vital for sustainability and even the survival of human civilisation.

The US-dominated military-industrial complex

Few areas of modern life are immune from military influence largely due to the highly-diversified nature of the military-industrial complex and its government patronage, which is much higher than other sectors such as health or education. For example, the US allocates about 58 per cent of its discretionary spending to the military but only 4 per cent to education (Ananda 2010), and in one year alone, the arms industry spent \$101,907,368 on lobbying the US government (Burley and Hoedeman 2011: 17–21). The military-industrial complex is inextricably linked with the state (Kurlansky, 2006 17–28) and in some countries (such as Burma and Egypt) the military directly runs a big proportion of the economy and state.

This domination of politics and industrial activity by the military is often referred to as the 'permanent war economy', perfectly described in George Orwell's novel *1984*. The military-industrial complex has a vested interest in the proliferation of arms (regardless of how they are used) as its corporations often hold the intellectual property rights to the most advanced military technologies and therefore are the main beneficiaries of arms production and procurement deals, worth hundreds of billions of dollars per annum, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

A 'revolving door' process in the appointment of military-industrial complex executives to senior governmental positions and vice-versa has enabled vested interests to control and profit from not only the development and manufacturing of weapons but from continued conflict, the rebuilding of war-torn states and the perpetuation of US-led international corporate hegemony.

Militarism's impact on the environment

Much has been written of militarism's impact on human societies and their economies. Rather less has been written on its impact on the environment. Figures for this are unclear, because of the relative secrecy of most military activity, which is exempted from the demands for transparency that most other government agencies face. Its contributions to climate change are also difficult to fathom, for the same reason. In response to my queries to the Australian Minister of Defence, for example, I was told that although the Australian Defence Force (ADF) reports its domestic electricity, gas and liquid fuel usage annually, '[d]ue to sensitivities regarding ... [ADF] operations, Defence is unable to provide detailed information regarding its activities and associated carbon footprint' (Letter from Stephen Smith MP, Minister for Defence, 4 April 2012). Air Chief Marshall Houston had earlier confirmed that the Defence Department's footprint is not measured (Medical Association for the Prevention of War 2010). Such measuring as does occur may only examine limited aspects of 'defence' footprints rather than all the military-industrial footprints which contribute, such as in the production of aircraft carriers.

What is clear, however, is that this impact is large. The military-industrial complex is regarded by numerous authors as the single largest polluter on the planet (Seager 1995; Saito 2000; Ostling and Miller 1992). Forces from developed countries produce 'the greatest amount of hazardous waste in the world' (Singer and Keating 1999:338) and are responsible for the release of more than two-thirds of CFC-113 into the ozone layer (Hay-Edie 2002:3). Even if there are practices which pollute more, militarism is the highest *public sector* polluter. Theoretically the public controls this pollution.

This pollution occurs through armed conflict but also through the production and movement of the militaries' juggernauts – battleships, submarines, tanks, trucks, cars and particularly their planes (Murty 2000) with the carbon footprint of an F-16 fighter jet 'much greater per mile travelled than motorized ground transport due to the height at which planes fly combined with the mixture of gases and particles they emit' (Nevins 2010). Pollution occurs in the production, testing and disposal of weapons and their waste products; housing, feeding and transporting military personnel; and training exercises. Other problems occur through militarisation of oil-producing regions; depletion of non-renewable resources such as oil to fuel troop movements; toxic chemical spills and radioactive waste; and diversion of funds from environmental actions to military ones. Most of these aspects are not counted when assessing a country's carbon emissions (McCue and Johnson 2011:5).

The US military is the major military polluter, and is responsible for about 47 per cent of the world's total military expenditure (World Council of Churches 2005), exceeding most other countries in the world combined. Along with the allies it leads, such as through NATO, it is responsible for almost three-quarters of global military expenditure (SIPRI 2010). Many of the arguments raised about the US military are also applicable, in varying degrees, to other militaries. In some cases the intensity of military-related pollution, if not the scale, may be higher in less developed countries due to inferior technological apparatus and expertise, poverty, corruption, and more severe weather such as equatorial monsoons.

General impacts of militarism on the environment

As Sue Wareham notes, 'the human and environmental costs of war are so far-reaching that a full examination of them would produce countless volumes' (Wareham 2009:33). It has been military practice down the ages for retreating armies to lay waste to enemy territory, from Genghis Khan, to Napoleon's retreat from Moscow, to crop and infrastructure destruction by

the Nazis in the Soviet Union, Holland and Norway. Scorched earth tactics were also used by the French in Algeria, the British in Kenya, and the Soviets in Afghanistan; dams were destroyed in Korea by the US, and rice crops severely disrupted (Thomas 1995: 110).

The environmental costs are often less obvious than the death and destruction that are the immediate consequences of war. Even prior to the industrial revolution, centuries of building ships for war and territorial conquest was a cause of widespread deforestation in Europe (Madan and Madan 2009: 305). Animals have fared little better, with almost a million horses killed during and after World War I, many simply to save the victors the trouble of returning them to countries, such as Australia, which had supplied them. Animal testing for military purposes has killed millions more (Thomas 1995: 82).

Prior to conflicts, frantic stockpiling of supplies, preparation for war, and refugee movements lead to over-exploitation of plant and animal resources, such as Kosovo's stately trees being cut down for firewood. To raise funds to buy military hardware, countries or factions may log rainforests, mine for diamonds, hunt endangered animals (including rhinoceroses and elephants in the Angolan 'civil' war) for meat, or traffic them to buy weapons and uniforms.

Environmental effects of war

Armed conflicts erode and poison soils, pollute rivers, and destroy crops and infrastructure. Deforestation may be part of military strategy, to remove hiding places from combatants. The massive use of herbicides such as Agent Orange during the Vietnam War resulted in the destruction of more than 800,000 hectares, or 14 per cent of South Vietnam's forests (Huseynov, 2011: 9). while bombing left the farming landscape defaced by 2.5 million craters, rendering about a third of Vietnam a wasteland. In all the wars between 1945 and 1982, Vietnam lost over 80 per cent of its forest cover, an important carbon store; this ecological devastation will take generations to repair (Hay-Edie 2002: 4).

During the Gulf War (1990–1), the US military dropped in just two days 800 Tomahawk cruise missiles – one every four minutes, day and night, for forty-eight hours, or more than one million kilograms of explosives. The bombing of Iraqi industrial plants resulted in large chemical spillages into the top soil of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (Huseynov 2011: 9). Fuel-air bombs, used to clear minefields, pulverised and decimated all nearby vegetation. Huge quantities of refuse, toxic materials and 170–200 million litres of sewage were left in sandpits by the coalition forces. The world's largest oil 'spill' was in Kuwait during that war, intentionally caused by retreating Iraqi forces opening valves from wells, pipe-lines and tankers. Four to eight million barrels of oil poured into the Persian Gulf, killing tens of thousands of birds and damaging 740 kilometres of coastline, in one of the largest incidents of marine environmental pollution in history. 700 well-heads were set on fire and burned in an inferno (Literathey 1993). After two decades of invasions, occupations and sanctions, the Iraqi Agriculture Ministry estimates that 90 per cent of the land suffers from severe desertification. A former Middle East breadbasket and food exporter, Iraq now imports 80 per cent of its food.

Post-war effects

Environmental governance, where it exists, often collapses due to political destabilisation. Environmental problems may increase as refugees return and the population tries to rebuild the country's infrastructure. Trying to meet food and energy needs alone may lead to over-exploitation of resources and severely deplete ecosystems. The large quantities of wood required for building purposes may cause extreme deforestation, followed by erosion and

rising salinity. Land mines and cluster bombs spread over wide areas of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East continue to spread death and destruction long after wars have ceased, killing and maiming rural dwellers in particular: 'Their removal is slow, painstaking and dangerous' (Wareham 2009: 40).

There are more than a thousand shipwrecks (mainly US and Japanese) from World War II (WWII), corroding on the ocean floors (Christie 2002). Of these, at least fifty are oil tankers. Military waste is often just being dumped in oceans, rivers or inadequate storage, contaminating local ecosystems. The Baltic, for example, was a dumping ground for Hitler's militaries. Thousands of tonnes of discarded WWII munitions were fished up by trawlers in 2007, including chemical weapons developed by Nazi scientists but never used. As their casings rust, phosgene and mustard gas seep into the food chain, rendering many fishing spots unusable (Hall 2007).

Nuclear waste is particularly hazardous and long-lasting. Waste sites such as in Chelyabinsk, La Hague, Yucca Mountain, Hanford, Sellafield and Murmansk are likely to be 'condemned in perpetuity'. The cost of dismantling nuclear weapons and their production facilities is difficult to calculate because of the close interconnection with nuclear energy production, but may approach the costs of making them in the first place, with some estimates reaching \$3.5 trillion for the US alone (Center for Defense Information, cited in Hay-Edie 2002: 3–4).

Maintaining armed forces

Just keeping the huge numbers of permanent military personnel has major environmental consequences. These personnel require houses, roads and other infrastructure, air conditioning and heating, food and water, and transport to work. When there is no major crisis, military training and exercises account for about 70 per cent of armed forces' activities (Huseynov, 2011: 9). They have a negative impact on neighbouring residents, such as high rates of cancer and infant deaths among people living near the US's Vieques Bombing Range (Saito 2000). They often damage farmland and infrastructure, as heavy vehicles such as tanks travel over small roads and bridges.

Low-frequency sonars used to detect submarines harm marine mammals, with the NATO naval exercises between the Canaries and the Straits of Gibraltar in September 2002 resulting in the death of fifteen beaked whales. Autopsies revealed lesions of the inner ear and showed that powerful sounds can kill large cetaceans whose species are already under threat from whaling and fishing (Huseynov 2011: 16).

As a result of naval accidents, there are at least 50 nuclear warheads and eleven nuclear reactors contaminating the ocean floors. Toxic pollution involving heavy metals, polychlorinated biphenyls, acids, alkalis and explosives has impacted on past and current US military bases in the Philippines, South Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Japan, Nicaragua, Panama, Puerto Rico and the former Yugoslavia (Hall 2007). Noise pollution (such as from low-flying aircraft) can affect animal populations and hunters who rely on them, while electromagnetic radiation from electronic signals and power may have adverse health effects.

Supplying militaries

The production of military equipment also has enormous environmental consequences. Building the giant battleships, submarines, fighter planes, bombers, tanks, four-wheel drives and other vehicles requires a great deal of materials – metals, rubber and plastics. Vast amounts of energy are required for the production processes – often from coal-fired or

nuclear power stations. Military communications and computer systems require rare earths, often sourced from less developed countries in Africa in an unsustainable and polluting way (Stanway and Regan 2012). Even shaving and clean, neatly-ironed uniforms for millions of personnel consume copious resources.

The production of weapons creates environmental problems. For example, the manufacturing of depleted uranium ammunition in Colonie, New York, contaminated the nearby soils with 500 times the amount of uranium that one would normally expect to find in soil (Feldman 2003). Radioactivity from nuclear bombs, testing, fuel and mining, and depleted uranium ammunition may contaminate land, seas and groundwater for thousands of years. Radioactive fallout from atmospheric nuclear tests, finally banned in 1963 through international outcry and boycotts of the offending countries, is estimated to have caused as many as 86,000 birth defects and 150,000 premature deaths, and may eventually result in more than two million deaths from cancer (Hay-Edie 2002: 7).

How militarism contributes to global warming

Although reliable figures on militarism's contributions to global warming are difficult to access because of its secrecy, size and diversity, its gargantuan impact on the environment can be extrapolated into significant climate change: 'Military operations are major industrial activities that use massive amounts of fuel and materials that significantly contribute to climate change' (Liska and Perrin 2010).

I have mentioned a number of different types of impacts on the environment from militarism, and most of these have a direct or indirect effect on global warming. Emissions from planes, ships and vehicles during conflict, training exercises or general military activities (including production and transport of the fuel) are the highest contributors to the greenhouse effect. Deforestation and destruction of vegetation releases carbon into the atmosphere, as do burning oil wells. Other emissions are created in the production of equipment (such as vehicles and weapons) and the movement of these vehicles, troops and supplies, the building and servicing of military bases, post-conflict reconstruction, clean-ups (when they occur) and storage of toxic waste. It is extraordinary that these emissions are largely exempt from the measuring and reporting that occurs in most other facets of modern global society. They are not part of major international discussions. They are rarely mentioned even at national forums.

The previous section has shown the enormous environmental pollution and resource depletion occasioned by war and militarism, and demonstrated that environmental sustainability is severely compromised by them. Elsewhere, I have examined the insatiable energy demands of militarism, the exemptions of militarism from climate action, and how militarism starves governments of climate funds (Branagan 2013: 14-19).

Nonviolent defence and regime change

A reduction in war and militarism is, therefore, an essential element of sustainability. One method of achieving this is through a greater understanding of, resourcing of and reliance upon nonviolent methods of national defence and removal of genocidal regimes. Nonviolent methods have been instrumental in the removal of numerous regimes as well as in some examples of national defence, such as Denmark's resistance of its WWII occupation by Nazi Germany (Branagan 2014). Successful anti-colonial campaigns, such as India's independence movement, could also be regarded as examples of effective nonviolent national defence.

Other examples include the overthrow by civic strikes of nine dictatorships in South America between 1931 and 1961 (Summy 2000), followed by the 1988 removal of Chile's dictator Augusto Pinochet. In 1986, the ruthless Philippines dictator Ferdinand Marcos was overthrown by thirty months of nonviolence, after seventeen years of communist attempts at violent overthrow of the state had failed. Examples elsewhere in the world include the deposing of the Shah of Iran in 1979, the dismantling of the Iron Curtain in the early 1990s, the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic in 2000 and Hosni Mubarak in 2011, entirely or mainly through unarmed popular resistance. If nonviolence can succeed against even the most ruthless of dictators and totalitarian police states, could it not be developed more widely as a means of national defence and for international forces to use to uphold their Responsibility to Protect obligations?

A number of theorists have utilised such examples to envisage much more widespread use of nonviolence for national defence, such as Desmond Ball's pioneering *Strategy and Defence* (1982), Gene Sharp's *Making Europe Ungovernable: The Potential of Civilian-based Deterrence and Defence* (1985) and his later *Civilian-Based Defense: A Post-Military Weapons System* (1990). More recently, Jorgen Johansen and Brian Martin released *Social Defence* (2019), which goes into detail in advocating it as a viable alternative (see also Branagan 2013: 62-67). Despite this work, the concept of nonviolent defence has achieved little traction, and could be better theorised and more widely promoted, such as through peace education. Academies, similar to military ones, could be employed to train both leadership teams as well as large numbers of citizens for widespread popular resistance. There are kernels of such peace education in the various Peace Studies departments at universities around the world, such as in Armidale, Australia, and Bradford, UK, or in the UN-mandated University for Peace in Costa Rica. These are struggling under the neo-liberalisation and commercialisation of universities, usually lack corporate sponsors, and their financial benefits are not immediately obvious. However, the dividends of peace are enormous, including environmental, social and economic, as demonstrated by the Institute for Economics and Peace's (2019) *Positive Peace Report*.

Australian environmental case studies have shown, albeit on a minor scale in a wealthy democracy, how nonviolence can be useful for the defence of a community from outside aggression, such as in the successful Bentley resistance. Here, an entire community in the Northern Rivers region of NSW used a wide range of nonviolent tactics, including lobbying, artistic activism, civil disobedience, and widespread non-cooperation, despite - or perhaps because of - the threat of 800 riot police being sent into the community from cities such as Sydney. Engagement in such actions is like joining an informal academy - informal, yet educationally effective as the learning occurs during actions in the real world. These campaigns demonstrate some of the immense potential of nonviolent defence.

Anti-war movements also contain the kernels of much larger and stronger nonviolent forces. Following successful Australian resistance of the 1991 AIDEX armaments fair (McIntyre 2008), the Melbourne-based International Campaign Against Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) became a global movement which succeeded in creating the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which entered into force on 22 January, 2021. This legally binding international agreement prohibits signatory states from developing, testing, producing, stockpiling, stationing, transferring, and using or threatening to use nuclear arms (Religions for Peace Australia 2021). This nonviolent movement could be regarded as the global community defending itself against the threat (environmental and social) of nuclear war.

Peace campaigner and suffragist Maude Royden called in 1931 for people to join her in forming a 'Peace Army' of unarmed resisters who would intervene between the combatants in the world's military confrontations. This has eventuated to some degree, in the *Shanti Shena* and *Khudai Khidmatgar* peace armies of India (Shepard (1987), the Gulf War Peace Camp of December 1990, the Time for Peace rally of the same year, the 'Walk for a Peaceful Future in the Middle East' in June 1992 (Rigby (1995), human shields, and the cross-border nonviolent advocacy during the second Palestinian Intifada (Dudouet 2009.) There was also the Balkan Peace Team (1994–2001) which operated in Croatia, Serbia and Kosovo, or the less ambitious but perhaps most effective group, *Peace Brigades International*, whose volunteers go into repressive regimes and accompany dissidents to prevent them from harm and to show international support (Rigby 2002). There are also nonviolent organisations working towards larger and more interventionary forces, such as *World Peace Brigade*, *Witness for Peace*, *Christian Peacemaker Teams*, *Rainbow Family of Living Light*, a German civilian peace service, and *Nonviolent Peaceforce*, the young international NGO based in Brussels, which has sent teams into Sri Lanka, Guatemala and the Philippines (Schweitzer 2009).

If governments, corporations and citizens were involved in a coordinated strategy for nonviolent defence, preferably involving a mass movement, they could prepare for maximum disruption and noncooperation in the event of an invasion. Civilian-based defence could oppose internal usurpations and foreign invasions through prepared nonviolent non-cooperation and defiance by the population and the society's institutions. The aim is to deny attackers their objectives, to become politically unrulable by would-be tyrants, and to subvert the attackers' troops and functionaries to unreliability and even mutiny (Ball 1982).

Actions could range from decentralisation of economic, political and social life (Oldfield 1989: 80) to the removal of all street signs or even the destruction of roads and bridges, communications and weapons. Facilities could be designed with removable components without which they would be inoperable (Martin 1999: 535–52). Bureaucratic go-slows could hinder foreign take-over of administration. Underground media could be pre-organised, and use both modern and traditional means. General strikes could shut down industries and transport (Johansen and Martin 2019: 112-116); evacuations could remove labour forces. Mass rallies or dispersed actions could show dissent and aim for conversion. Blockades, although risky to the participants, could slow the occupation and greet invaders with a colourful, musical, theatrical wall of determined resistance. Maintaining such forces would still have financial and environmental costs, but far less than the current military forces, with their fighter planes, destroyers and tanks.

In this way, nonviolent defence could cut defence spending dramatically. This would allow that money to be spent instead on environmental protection and sustainability programmes. Costa Rica, for example, dismantled its army and discontinued armed national defence in 1948; now it is globally recognised for its 'democratic institutions, the remarkably healthy and happy population, and, not least, the fact that Costa Rica has been able to invest not only in its people but also in preserving about 25% of its land area in either national parks or biological reserves' (Barash 2013).

The money saved from cutting 'defence' spending could also be used instead for education, health, the arts, poverty reduction, homelessness – thereby reducing inequality and crime, with further savings from fewer prisons needed, healthier and better educated societies. More

spent on diplomacy, aid, trade and cultural exchange would reduce regional tensions, build links and reduce regional arms buildups. All this would contribute to social sustainability, which feeds into environmental sustainability; where people are less desperate and more educated, they tend to care for their environments better.

Conclusion

This submission has examined the environmental footprint of militarism, as exemplified by the United States-Australian military alliance, and shown that reducing this footprint is essential for global sustainability. This footprint can be reduced by making militaries more environmentally-friendly, but a more fundamental long-term solution is to reduce militarism and the need for it, by replacing it with nonviolent methods of defence and regime removal.

Replacing the expensive and polluting culture of militarism, war and violence with nonviolent methods of conflict resolution would have threefold benefits. One, it would allow the redistribution of funds from militarism to poverty reduction, and climate mitigation and adaptation strategies. Two, it would eliminate a significant contributor to the global environmental crisis of resource depletion, climate change and biodiversity loss. Finally, it would support nonviolent campaigns for environmental protection, sustainability and poverty reduction.

Although such a move seems unlikely and even naïve, it is in accordance with the 2030 Agenda's acknowledgement of 'the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path' (UN 2015). All positive change begins with an understanding of the problem and a vision of the future.

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