

The People's Inquiry

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Submission

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THE US ALLIANCE AND AUSTRALIAN MILITARISM

Introductory statement

The militaristic tunnel that Australia has dug itself into, particularly over recent decades, is alarming. The tunnel's building blocks include 'offensive' defence policies and plans; ever-deepening entanglements with the USA's military-industrial complex; acquisition of futuristic hi-tech military capabilities; involvements in devastating foreign wars; and outlays of profligate amounts of public money. All of this has been undertaken with little parliamentary oversight or public debate. A lack of transparency and accountability has been glossed over with politicians' fear-fuelling public statements, often bellicose and jingoistic. All of this at a time when we, with the rest of the world, are in the grip of a recalcitrant pandemic and an ecological crisis at an imminent tipping point! Like never before in human history, the world needs wise, canny diplomacy and a universal commitment to respectful, collaborative international relations. We need peace. Militaristic ideology is permeating national governance, blinding decision makers to the rich opportunities Australia has to be part of solutions to the health and environmental problems our endangered world faces.

Is independence an antidote to militarism?

Australia's military alliance with the USA had been the bulwark of the nation's defence policy since mid-20th century. During that time, our militarising tendencies have grown, reaching a point where a crude militarism now distorts our international relations, domestic politics and is infiltrating civilian life. The US Alliance is a big part of the picture, the depth of integration of Australia's policies, forces and capabilities with those of the USA becoming such that Australia can no longer be said to be militarily a discrete entity. The degree to which we can attribute Australian militarism to the US Alliance is a tricky question. Would an end to the Alliance see an end to Australian militarism and the emergence of a genuinely more peaceful, just and secure Australia? I think it would. At least, it would be a necessary first step. Independence from the US Alliance would not guarantee replacement with non-offensive defence and

foreign affairs policies, but it would make the development of such policies possible. A break from the Alliance would be a necessary move but not a sufficient one.

In its probing May 2020 paper, 'Militarisation in Australia: Normalisation and Mythology', the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF-Australia) reports on its researches into the increasing militarisation in Australia by honing-in on three areas: defence policy and expenditure; expanding domestic defence industry and arms export; and normalisation of militarisation in the domestic arena. It has characterised its paper as a first step towards a deep analysis that the problem of Australian militarisation demands. In this submission, I have by no means begun to augment WILPF's work but simply tried to indicate that analysis of the problem would be incomplete while ever the militarising impacts of the US Alliance were overlooked.

Australian militarism and US-led wars

The ease with which Australia joins with US forces to fight US-led wars is astounding. With the casualness of plucking feathers out of thin air, politicians produce a collection of vague unsubstantiated reasons for war. For example, in 2007, then PM Kevin Rudd told us we were at war in Afghanistan to meet obligations under the ANZUS agreement. He was undoubtedly aware that ANZUS does not oblige its signatories to support each other's wars. More recently, current Minister for Defence, Peter Dutton, has announced establishment of a national commemoration day to recognise the sacrifices of Australian defence personnel who served in the Afghanistan War and "who helped to save Australian lives from terrorist attacks on our own soil" (media release 19 July 2021): a risible careless claim. It is also a claim showing the callousness only a blinding militarism could induce, given what the Afghani people have suffered during twenty years of war and their plight now.

Richard Tanter, in his Arena 139 article 'Australia's addiction for alliance war' (Dec 2015), lists no less than eight US-led wars that Australia has fought since 1950: Korean, Vietnam, Gulf, Afghanistan, Iraq I, Iraq II, Syria, Yemen. Each of these wars was or will be an inevitable failure for its US-led coalition and each was/is devastating for local populations, leaving innumerable civilian casualties, economies in ruin and long-lasting environmental destruction. Nonetheless, as made clear in the 2020 Defence Strategic Update, Australia remains committed to being prepared to deploy its forces to wherever the US might be perpetrating war.

Even if we were not to send personnel to a US theatre of war, we would remain a participant through the role of the Australian-hosted US communication and information gathering bases, Pine Gap in particular. Thanks to the diligent work of researchers such as Tanter, confirmed by NSA documents leaked by whistle blower Edward Snowden, we know that Pine Gap has world-wide surveillance and target location capabilities, and can support US forces no matter where they are fighting. In an August 2017 radio broadcast with journalist Peter Cronau, Tanter said: *“The [NSA] documents show us that Pine Gap is definitely involved in American military operations in Afghanistan, in the Middle East, in fact around the world where necessary. So these documents are confirmation of what we understood Pine Gap to be capable of, and we now know for sure that this is what Pine Gap does.”*

<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/backgroundbriefing/the-base-pine-gaps-role-in-us-warfighting/8813604>.

The addiction to participation in the wars of our mighty friend is evidence and driver of the nation’s militarism.

Militaristic policy—2020 Defence Strategic Update

The Defence Department’s 2020 Defence Strategic Update (DSU) exemplifies Australia’s burgeoning militarism. It is remarkable for its hawkishness, prescribing an exorbitantly expensive build-up in military capability. Justification given for the build-up includes increased strategic competition between US and China; developments in military hi-tech; and increasing coercive ‘grey zone’ tactics. China is the inferred and at times stated ‘grey-zone’ tactician, including exploiter of its influence in the region.

The DSU envisages an Australia whose strategic focus is on in its immediate region and one that has greater military self-reliance, but not at the expense of its relation with the USA. In fact, the DSU’s Australia is a stronger US ally—a better muscled supporter of US rivalry against China. The strategy contains no hint of a neutral place from where tensions between China and Australia could begin to be resolved and friendship fostered. The only mentions in the DSU of collaboration and cooperation with other nations are with allies and friends. The strategy is an irresponsible provocation aimed at China.

The DSU introduces three new objectives—SHAPE. DETER. RESPOND.—“to guide all defence planning...” (2.13). To implement these objectives the ADF is to make the immediate Indo-Pacific region its priority; increase the nation’s deterrent power through greater self-reliance; strengthen its capability to

respond to grey zone activities; enhance lethality of its 'high intensity operations'; remain globally deployable, including to US-led operations; and build capacity to support the responses of civil authorities to natural disasters and crises (2.13).

Shape. The area of our region that the government has selected as its main 'strategic environment' is broad, encompassing the north-eastern Indian Ocean, maritime and mainland South East Asia, Papua New Guinea and the South West Pacific. Reshaping tools include stronger partnerships and diplomatic ties with its allies—primarily USA, also NZ and Japan (2.6), with India and Indonesia getting specific mentions elsewhere in the plan(2.18); and those nations that 'share our interests'—ASEAN member nations, PNG, Timor Leste and Pacific Island nations (2.3). China is conspicuous for its absence. Australia plans to 'shape' this area to the advantage of its own national interests and those it shares with allies and friends.

It is astonishing that the need to preserve and strengthen diplomatic relations with China is not considered paramount to Australia's security. 'Reshaping' our relationship with China to defuse the hostility and tensions that now burden it is crucial to our security. The two most deadly challenges for our region, the pandemic and climate change, not only demand respectful effective confidence building and collaboration with China but present golden opportunities for reversing the enmity in Australia-China relations that now exists.

The DSU's emphasis on developing partnerships only with those we consider friends is divisive and presumptive. It is pressuring nations to take sides, to align themselves with Australia's stated interests when it is obvious in some cases, very likely in others, that many regional states are seeking friendly relations with China.

Throughout the DSU, the government's Pacific Step-up aid program for the Pacific Island nations gets several mentions as one of the broader regional initiatives that the new strategy brings into tighter focus for defence planners, a fairly strong intimation that aid to 'our Pacific family' has a lot to do with countering Chinese interest.

Interests of the Pacific Island Nations

To legitimise a seemingly proprietary regard for the Pacific Island nations (often referred to by Australian as 'our Pacific family'), the DSU invokes the BOE Declaration on Regional Security, signed by the 18 members of the 2018 Pacific Forum (2.5). It is debatable whether Australia's strategic stance has much in common with either word or spirit of this declaration. BOE affirms what Pacific Island nations have been affirming for many years: climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and well being of the peoples of the Pacific". Its six Strategic Focus Areas, in order of priority, are: climate security; human security and humanitarian assistance; environmental and resource security; transnational crime; cyber crime and cyber-enabled crime; and creating an enabling environment for implementation ...(and) coordination. Militarised security provided by the largest members of the forum (i.e. Australia and NZ) for the smaller does not feature in this declaration.

BOE also has a different take on what 'rule-based international order' means than Australia. What is supported in BOE is an international order based on *"the UN Charter, adherence to relevant international law and resolution of international disputes by peaceful means"*. The international order supported in the DSU has a more US tone *"economic growth, security, prosperity and our values (as well as) ...laws and treaties, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and international institutions that help constrain the exercise of coercive power and support collective responses to challenges such as terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction"*. In BOE, but missing from the DSU, is an emphasis on peace, including disarmament (e.g. Proposed actions 2 (ii)).

The DSU promotes partnerships that involve 'cooperative defence activities' and allow Australia unconstrained operational access in the region and the ability "to deploy military force in support of shared interests". ADF preparedness to lead coalition operations is a DSU 'must' (2.16). Furthermore, what is said to be critical for Australia's enhanced role in the region is its alliance with the USA, which is to be increasingly deepened (2.18).

Deter. The DSU finds Australia's current defence forces lacking: they are 'largely defensive'. The government is now planning for an aggressive offensive force, justifying such a development mainly on the threat of access- and area-

denial capabilities of adversaries. The ADF must have the capabilities (i.e. longer-range strike weapons, cyber capability and other area-denial capabilities) to put at risk 'from a greater distance' the forces and infrastructure of potential adversaries (2.21 & 2.23). While Australia is to remain dependent on the US nuclear and conventional powers to deter nuclear threats, it is to acquire sufficient self-reliant capacity to deter conventional attack (2.22). By resorting to the arguably tautological concepts of 'offensive' and 'deployed' deterrence, the DSU is surely admitting that deterrence is in fact unreliable, if not unworkable. A deployment that is armed with offensive weaponry is not a deterrent but at best a provocation, at worst a call to arms by a state that senses danger.

Respond. The possibility of high-intensity conflict in the Indo-Pacific is the lynchpin on which the DSU decides the level of 'lethality' and readiness to be acquired by the ADF. Engaging with industry for higher technological capacity as well as reliable supply chains, and increasing interdependence with the USA and other partners are the prescribed actions. Here, Australia is pushing itself into acquiring maximal state-of-the-art military power, while remaining dependent on the USA. It is clear that Australia could never be fully competitive in relation to China and this is admitted, more or less, in the DSU (2.23). By implication this means Australia is planning to run an unwinnable race. China, if it is so inclined, would always find ways to outmatch Australia's powers to deter and respond. This plan is entrapping us in a spiral of unrelenting dangerous military modernisation and build-up. It is irrational. It is helping to set up a barrier to peace, to ecological repair and global health, all worldwide imperatives. Without the world accepting China, the western world in particular, these threats cannot be effectively dealt with.

In her Lowy Institute article 'Stoking the fire of Asia-Pacific missile proliferation' (10 July 2020), Dr Tanya Ogilvie-White, acutely concerned about the Asia-Pacific's arms race in missile technology, optimistically suggests that the government's motivation behind the DSU just might be a hope that the strategy would act as a signal to Beijing "that it is time to stop the current missile arms race and engage in serious arms-control dialogue". If there is such a ploy behind the DSU, then sadly it does not seem to have worked. Twelve months have passed, tensions between Australia and China have increased and Biden's ascendancy does not appear to be bearing peaceful fruit.

The DSU gives a very limited place to the useful notion of 'human security', acknowledging that political, economic, health and environmental problems are likely to lead to political instability and state fragility. However, the plan

unquestioningly sees these insecurities as requiring a military response: the ADF is prioritised as the agency to meet the needs for evacuation, humanitarian and disaster relief and ‘stabilisation operations’ (2.17-18). Recent local disasters have spotlighted the need for improved resourcing of local fire brigades, local SES teams, local governments and relevant local NGOs. Soldiers may be more richly resourced but military training has limited application to civilian crises. Their increased involvement in local disaster response is an example of the ongoing normalisation of the military presence in Australian civilian life.

WILPF, in its above mentioned 2020 paper, makes the valuable and arresting point that reliance on the military for non-military services is leading Australians to see the ADF more as a social service organisation than the combatant institution that it is. This is dangerous—a sign that the threshold for what is innocuous military involvement in civilian life is being breached. WILPF asks the important question: *“Does the normalisation of militarisation strengthen our civil society, or does it contribute to an increased dependency on a well-funded military infrastructure and personnel to address disasters, fires and pandemics in Australia to the detriment of the capability and resilience of Australia’s civilian responses and communities?”* (p.7)

The problems of putting international humanitarian aid and disaster relief (HADR) in the hands of foreign armed forces are not addressed in the DSU. It is telling that the underfunding suffered for past decades by the Department of Foreign Affairs, where Australia’s international humanitarian strategy is developed and administered, has run in parallel with the excessive funding of defence. DFAT’s humanitarian strategy appears fit for purpose, but there is no doubt it could not be robustly implemented on the funding DFAT now gets. It should be noted that the ADF is not listed in DFAT’s strategy as a partner, but as having a stand-by role. Any participation by the ADF in international HADR should be decided and led by DFAT, based on a request or expression of acceptance from the recipient community.

In regard to aid, China is accused of exploiting the situation in its pursuit of greater influence among Indo-Pacific states. Such accusations are made in bad faith. If China is putting undue pressure on its aid recipients or using aid and loans in other inappropriate ways, it should be criticised, but not before Australia acknowledges its own murky aid record and does something credible to reform its ways. All donor countries are guilty of loading their aid with self-interest.

Implementation of the Shape, Deter, Respond objectives is said to increase Australia's self-reliance, one of the DSU's aims. However, implementation is explicated to also show that the US relationship is not to be neglected. The security environment of the region that Australia has defined for itself is where, according to the DSU, Australia can best cooperate with the USA (2.7.)

"Australia is a staunch and active ally of the United States, which continues to underwrite the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific. We will continue working with the United States to build defence cooperation in the region to meet security challenges – such as the ongoing threat from terrorism – and to build common approaches to ensure stability in our region." The DSU also makes clear that Australia is to continue to be prepared to make military contributions beyond the region *"where our interests are sufficiently engaged including in support of US-led coalitions and counter terrorism actions such as in the Middle East"*; ADF availability for the 'wider Indo-Pacific', including north Asia is also assured. Australia is not to desert its supporting role in maintaining 'global order' (2.28) as established by the US.

According to the DSU, plans are afoot for Australia to acquire a network of satellites to provide "independent and sovereign communications" for defence purposes (3.22). This investment will increase Australia's irresponsible contribution to the militarisation of space, but it will not achieve independence from US-owned and controlled global communication, surveillance and targeting network. Only closure of Australian hosted US satellite ground bases, especially Pine Gap, would ensure that level of independence.

Enhanced capabilities – ethical, legal?

A gaping hole in the DSU, and probably typical of all such strategy documents, is the failure to give an account of the legal and ethical risks posed by the ongoing modernisation of ADF capabilities. Futuristic capabilities, capabilities still in development, that are promised in this updated strategy include the latest in autonomous vehicles (perhaps weaponised) and faster, longer-range guided strike weapons for land, sea and air (e.g. DSU 3.18). Hypersonic missiles were a 'perhaps' at the time of the DSU, but within a few months, the Defence Minister announced an Australian-US venture to go ahead with development. Ethically, these weapons are unacceptable. The implications of their use and proliferation have not been satisfactorily established, the only certainty being that the current arms control regime is hopelessly unfit for purpose.

A wiser response

Ogilvie-White, in her above-cited article, says of Australia's decisions to join the Asia-Pacific's accelerating missile race "*... not only will it not keep the nation safe, it will stoke an uncontrolled fire that is engulfing the region's strategic landscape. The wise response would be to throw everything at firefighting – at garnering international support for a formal arms-control dialogue, a missile moratorium and the creation of a new arms-control architecture to replace the now-defunct INF treaty, the lapsing of which has allowed this fire to spread*".

The DSU plan for increasing its military use of space is also devoid of any reference to the dangers of militarising space and the inadequacies of international space law.

Militarisation and the 'rule of law'

While president of the Australian Human Rights Commission, Gillian Triggs highlighted the militarisation of government, combined with the making of laws that seriously undermine individual freedoms, as a compounding factor in a dangerous over-empowerment of the executive arm of the federal government. In 2015, she said "*The government's uncontested assessment of national interest and security often trumps the rule of domestic and international law, as well as Australia's obligations under human rights treaties. ... Compounding the concentration of power in the executive's hands is the recent increasing militarisation of government and the criminalisation of behaviour that has not hitherto been the subject of criminal penalties.*"

<https://theconversation.com/gillian-triggs-how-the-fair-go-became-the-last-bulwark-for-australias-freedoms-49743> .

In a later article, she continues to make this point, explaining how the executive has put itself above the law, sidelining the judiciary and failing to maintain the separation of powers, the doctrine necessary to the protection of our democratic freedoms.

<http://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/VicULawJJI/2017/3.html>. From her legal perspective, what is being torn asunder, she claims, is the very 'rule of law', the principles of which include equality before the law, independence of the judiciary, right to fair trial; punishment that is proportionate and only imposed by courts; and prohibition of arbitrary detention.

Triggs reminds us of the citing by Australian Law Reform Commission in 2014 of 121 laws that “infringe our democratic freedoms, from mandatory sentencing laws to restrictions on environmental protests”. In her above-mentioned 2017 article, she lists ten examples of law making and other interventions that have empowered the executive at the expense of democracy and human rights. Most examples are to the benefit of the nation’s rapidly expanding military-security complex and can be summarised as follows:

- the tranches of counter-terrorism laws disproportionate to the level of potential threat; billion dollar budgets for surveillance agencies and detention regimes; creation by executive decree of the Ministry of Home Affairs (i.e. of Home Security); the notorious ‘meta-data’ laws; extension of control orders to 14 year olds;
- punitive immigration laws, allowing, among other inhumane measures, indefinite detention and conditions of detention that amount to torture;
- unprecedented discretionary powers granted to the minister for immigration, including the power to overturn Administrative Appeals Tribunal decisions;
- language demands and other conditions placed on citizenship that are potentially discriminatory;
- mandatory sentences, bypassing the role of the judge;
- uses of Australia’s long outdated executive ‘war powers’; the decision to go to war is not a matter for parliament but is in the hands of the PM of the day (it is not surprising that the nation can and has deployed troops to wars of invasion, wars unapproved by the UN, wars many experts warn are unwinnable and wars so demoralising that we end up responsible for war crimes);
- authorisations of military assistance and arms sales to governments with records of serious human rights abuses (e.g. significant assistance to the Philippine’s Duterte administration, and arms exports to Saudi Arabia and UAE during their war on Yemen).

Triggs laments that governments gain support for these huge impositions through exploitation and fuelling of the fears of their voting public. *“Sadly, governments over recent years have taken advantage of the fears of unregulated movements of peoples across boundaries in search of protection and a better life, the fear of global terrorism and, on occasion, fostered Islamophobia. On the pretext of fear, governments, often supported by the opposition, have extended their executive powers.”* Her line of thinking points to the coincidence between the US War on Terror, that Australia enthusiastically joined, and to the beginning of heavy-handed counter-terrorism measures, as well as the escalation of fear of terrorism and xenophobia in the community.

The Economy

With the 2016 Defence White Paper, the defence budget was 'decoupled from the GDP and a ten year funding model introduced, ensuring that if the department failed to spend a yearly budget in full, the unspent portion would be available for the next year. The first ten year budget allocated \$195 billion for procurement, which now stands at \$270 billion for the decade to 2029-30. Hell-bent on militarising the national economy, both Turnbull and Morrison Governments have undertaken to keep as much as possible of these funds within the country for use by local defence companies. However, the USA is a big, if not the biggest, beneficiary of these funds: Australia is the second biggest importer of US weaponry, second only to Saudi Arabia.

The government is now endeavouring to make the local defence industry a significant locus for the country's economic recovery from the COVID pandemic. In a media release 12 May 2021, the current Minister for Defence Industry, Melissa Price, boasted that the Government has sustained jobs and business during the first year of the pandemic by accelerating the payment of \$26.9 billion in invoices to defence companies.

If the online Government sponsored entity DefenceConnect, which avidly promotes the latest happenings across the defence realm, is any measure of the 'busyness' of local defence enterprises, the government big spend is making arms dealers very happy, especially the Australian subsidiaries of the big international arms corporations. It is notable that most defence work that is available to Australia's small and medium defence businesses consists of contracts for the supply chains for projects of the Australian-based subsidiaries or their parent companies overseas. So much for the promise of a sovereign defence industry and greater self reliance.

A recent DefenceConnect report on Australia's plans to acquire long-range precision missile capabilities (DefenceConnet News 13 August 2021 'Australia, US to collaborate for precision missile project') is but one example of where and how defence money is being spent. It also illustrates how militarisation of the Australian economy in no way disadvantages the US Alliance. Following a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Australian Army and US Armed Forces to "increase lethality, range and ... [accuracy]" of a baseline missile in development, the Australian Government has committed \$70 million towards the USA's \$907 million development project for "long range surface-to-surface, all weather, precision-strike guided missiles". According to a spokesperson for the US Army's Defence Exports and Cooperation, the

agreement is one of the USA's biggest acquisition programs involving a partner nation. In conjunction with the MOU, the Australian Government has committed \$1 billion to the establishment of what is called a "Sovereign Guided Weapons and Explosive Enterprise (GWEOE)" capability for the ADF. Several local companies have signed up, (including EOS, prosperous exporter of armaments to Saudi Arabia).

At about the same time that the MUO and GWEOE were set in train, it was reported that Lockheed Martin Australia, working with Thales Australia, has agreed to design, develop and produce Lockheed Martin's Long-range Anti-Ship Missile-Surface Launch for the ADF and export. About this project, the words of Lockheed Martin's Australian CEO shows the sympathy that exists between his company's interests and government policy: *"This is a step change for future weapons manufacture in Australia – through technology transfer and innovation we see the opportunity to drive the creation of a skilled local workforce, build resiliency in supply chains and help secure Australia's sovereign defence capabilities for now and into the future ..."* (DefenceConnect 22 April 2021).

In 2018, then Defence Minister Christopher Pyne announced a new Defence Export Strategy that would, we were assured, benefit 'jobs and growth'. It also had the goal of transforming the country into a Top Ten global weapons exporter. The plan involved: a \$3.8 billion Defence Export Facility, administered by EFIC, Australia's export credit agency, that makes easy-term loans available to would-be exporters; a new Defence Export Office; a Defence Export Advocate (David Johnston, Abbott's old defence minister); annual funds (\$20million 2018-19) for multi-year defence export campaigns; enhancement of the Department of Defence (DOD) Global Supply Chain Program; and grants for small to medium enterprises. All states and territories backed the new promise of business subsidisation and incentives and aligned their defence industry strategies to the new strategy.

The local defence industry is dependent on the global supply chains of the big primes. Australia's ambitions to become a hi-tech offensive provocative military power is dependent on its integration with the US military-industrial complex, which includes, of course, the big US international arms manufacturers, the so-called 'primes'. Many American states have become economically dependent on arms manufacture and the powerful arms corporations, skewing any chance of Congress representatives of those states from working for reductions in military spending and moves towards disarmament. Is this where Australia is heading? Will we find ourselves not

only dependent on the arms 'primes' for materiel but for jobs? For Australia to become 'strategically competitive' to the degree proposed in recent plans and policy, it will remain dependent on the big arms primes. Surely this prospect puts a dark cloud over the sort of self-reliance proposed in the DSU, which requires commitment to arms competitiveness (i.e. to participation in arms races in jet fighters, submarines, missiles, space and cyber technology).

It is perverse of Australia not to have used its strong economic relation with China to better advantage. Australia has or had a promising position to play broker of peace between China and the US. Whether it is too late now is a mute point—the hawks on both sides seem to be winning, and the hawks here in Australia have done damage. However late it is, the opportunity is possibly recoverable and it would be to the advantage of national and global security were Australia to pursue it.

Conclusion

In her address to the launch of The People's Enquiry, Kellie Tranter presented an 11-point aim condensed from the views of many contributing experts on what directions reform of Australia defence and foreign affairs strategies should take. Combined, the views if taken would indeed result in policies genuinely conducive of peace, justice and security for our nation and region. At the same time, I think each view included in Kelly's list presupposes military independence from the USA, not as a guarantee in itself but as a necessary step.