

Submission - Exploring the case for an Independent and Peaceful Australia

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Introduction

Recent global and domestic events have further highlighted the urgent need for Australia to reassess its foreign and defence policies.

The impact of the Covid pandemic in Australia and the region is putting enormous pressure on the allocation of government resources. If Australia's political parties are going to be true to their stated commitment to foster peace, security and human rights in the region their needs to be a complete reassessment of our foreign affairs policies including military exercises, military aid and trade and intelligence and the security operations all these deals sit under.

It is time that Australia's budget and policy commitment to countries in our region and countries suffering due to natural and human made disasters was given a major overhaul. Improving people's health and welfare and raising environmental protection standards should be the core of our overseas work. This is essential if we are to achieve a truly independent foreign policy that no longer has the ANZUS Treaty or any treaty based on automatic mutual military assistance as the foundation of country to country relationships.

Budget allocations

The obscene amounts of money allocated by the Australian government to the military compared to overseas aid a shows the urgent need for a shift in foreign affairs' priorities.

The Coalition parties and Labor have both agreed that defence spending should increase to two per cent of GDP by 2020–21. This has been achieved with funding now at 2.1 per cent of GDP. Defence is set to receive \$44.62 billion, a 4.4 per cent increase on the previous financial year.

For the 2021-22 budget Australia's overseas aid budget was cut by 4.9 per cent bringing it to \$4.34 billion. As a proportion of Gross National Income (GNI) our overseas aid allocation has dropped to 0.22 per cent. The United Nations target, that Australia has agreed to at various international fora, is that countries spend 0.7 per cent of their GNI on Official Development Assistance. A number of

European countries, including Sweden, Denmark and Norway allocate this percentage of GNI or more to overseas aid.¹

The disparity between Australia's budget for the military compared with overseas aid will get much worse in coming years. The [2016 Defence White Paper](#) sets out alarming growth through to 2030. Meanwhile there is no indication that the Coalition or Labor plan to increase the aid budget.

Recommendation

- **Call on the Australian government and opposition to -**
 - **remove the policy that requires military spending to be at least two percent of GDP;**
 - **freeze the military budget at current level; and**
 - **initiate a public debate about the size of the next defence and overseas aid budget allocations and also how to improve transparency and accountability of this spending.**

Quad's secret agenda

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, known as Quad, that comprises the US, Australia, Japan and India, looks set to take our region in a highly militarised direction. While most of the recent Quad documents have been about non military issues such as responding to climate change and promoting economic cooperation by far the majority of actual activities have a military intent.

Last year Australia took part in large-scale military exercises in the Indian Ocean with the three Quad members. It is widely recognised by academics and journalists that Quad activities of this foursome are in line with the commitment US President Joe Biden gave on coming into office that he wanted to unite allies to contain China. Military sales and purchases by these four countries are also on the increase. For example a Japanese company is now manufacturing military planes in India. The Memorandum of Understanding for this project details that the Indian government will provide assistance for the project and agree to purchase planes for the Indian Navy.

Meanwhile India has become the biggest purchaser of Israeli manufactured armaments. Australia has paid \$800 million for Long Range Anti-Ship Missiles from the US Navy. It is a justified conclusion that Quad is driving a worrying arms race in military related sales between nations in the Indo-Pacific region.

The formation of this grouping further underlines the importance of Australia committing to and adopting an independent foreign affairs policy.

Recommendation

- **The Australian government to -**
 - **work on reducing tensions in the South China Sea by promoting a commitment among all Quad members to not use force to resolve political and territorial disputes.**

¹ Aid is measured as a percentage of GNI, while defence as a percentage of GDP. While this means the percentage figures above cannot be directly compared, the size of the disparity and the fact that as a percentage of GDP or GNI there is only a small difference, indicates that these figures still make an important point about budget allocations.

- *reduce military and political tensions in the Indo-Pacific region the Quad military exercises should cease or be designed to reduce their focus on China.*
- *work to renegotiate the Quad agreement and activities to be about assisting the health and welfare of people and promoting environmental protection in the region.*
- *not allow Australian waters and territory to be used for Quad military exercises.*
- *use its involvement in both ASEAN and Quad to work with other countries to phase out US military operations in this region.*

US war bases in Australia and the region

In considering the speculation around the alleged military threat China poses to this region it should be remembered that US war bases are already prominent in numbers and the regional activities they initiate. These US bases pose a threat to any attempts to work for peaceful coexistence and demilitarisation in our region.

In the Pacific the US has a base on Guam, Kwajalein and Wake Islands. In a worrying development the US and Australia are planning to build a joint base on Papua New Guinea's Manus Island. In the Indian Ocean the US has a major base on Diego Garcia that can accommodate 3,000 to 5,000 US and British personnel at any one time. On top of these bases both the Philippines and Japan each host over 20 US war bases. US bases in Australia include the Pine Gap Surveillance Station; the Naval Communication Station Harold E. Holt, in Western Australia; and the US Marine Rotational Force, in Darwin.

Recommendation

- *Bases on all Australian territories to be under the control of the Australian government with a public reassessment to be made of what activities should occur at these bases.*

Nuclear issues

There was a major breakthrough last year when Thailand ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. This means that all ten ASEAN countries have now ratified the treaty. This shows a strong regional commitment to keep the region free from nuclear weapons. The fact that there are three countries in the region - India, China and Pakistan - that have nuclear weapons shows that there is still more work to be done on building a nuclear free Indo-Pacific.

Despite the fact that some US allies, including New Zealand, Thailand and the Philippines, have ratified the Treaty the Australian government has stated that it would be inconsistent with its US alliance obligations.

Recommendation

- *The Australia government ratifies the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.*

Terrorism and Authoritarianism

Terrorism is a shocking product of warfare and political divisions. It should always be condemned. However, the leaders of the US, Australia and some allies has made the fight against terrorism much more difficult because of their failure to deal with the causes of terrorism and their hesitancy to condemn the terrorist tactics of right wing leaders and right wing extremist groups.

The Australian government's close relations with the authoritarian governments of Filipino President Rodrigo Roa Duterte and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also a product of the unhealthy reliance on the US alliance. It suits past and current US administrations to ignore the shocking human rights abuses occurring in these countries as they see a political advantage in having the Indian and Filipino governments onside in any disputes with China. Unfortunately Australian governments follow the US lead in these matters.

In March this year President Biden went so far to describe India as one of a group of "strong democracies". This is at a time when Genocide Watch has identified genocidal acts in India. The rights group, Freedom House, have described India as descending into authoritarianism. Interfaith marriages have been criminalised and there are now laws to facilitate millions of Indian citizens being stripped of their citizenship. There are credible reports of an increase in lynchings, deaths in custody and disappearances of Muslims. The people of Kashmir, the only majority Muslim state in India, have had their autonomy taken away and are suffering ongoing human rights abuses.

The Australian Prime Minister has failed to take up any of these issues with the Indian leadership. This stands in sharp contrast with how the Prime Minister interacts with China. Mr Morrison has raised the issue of human rights abuses in Hong Kong and against the Uyghur Muslims with the Chinese leadership on a number of occasions.

Recommendation

- ***Australian government ministers and the Prime Minister in bilateral talks with the leaders of other countries to -***
 - ***speak out against the human rights abuses in India and the Philippines in a way similar to how abuses in China are taken up.***
- ***Australian government to ensure that the relevant agencies work to stop all terrorist activities, including those perpetrated by extreme right wing groups.***

Future of the Australia-US Alliance

The ANZUS Treaty refers to the arrangement between Australia and New Zealand and, separately between Australia and the USA in times of conflict. It covers the possibility of cooperation on military matters in the Pacific region, although today the treaty is interpreted as applying to conflicts anywhere. The treaty says the signatories will "consult together" and "act to meet the common danger". However, US leaders have often asserted that they will only take military action when the interests of the USA are threatened.

This Treaty has become more and more controversial in Australia as successive governments, both Coalition and Labor, have used this alliance as justification for following the US into numerous unjust wars. This has resulted in thousands of Australian soldiers being killed and wounded and shocking death and destruction occurring in countries from the Middle East to Vietnam that we invaded at the behest of the US.

These ongoing military failures - Afghanistan being the latest - highlight have much the outlook of the US and Australia, and our nation's strategic arrangements have changed since this Treaty was negotiated. Our future lies in building peace not fighting wars. This is what a negotiated Treaty needs to build on.

Recommendation -

- Renegotiate the ANZUS Treaty so it commits Australia to an independent foreign policy and sets out how Australia works with other countries to secure peace and support disarmament measures.

- Legislate so members of parliament have the power to decide whether Australia goes to war.

- End the Morrison government's plan to make Australia a global arms dealer.

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Submitted by

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