

# Submission to the IPAN inquiry on the costs and benefits of the US Alliance, from Kathryn Kelly

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry. There are many aspects of costs and benefits of the US alliance and our involvement in US-led wars which warrant comment. In this submission, I deal just with the environmental aspects of the relationship.

## *Introduction*

Australian governments have been extremely submissive to the USA since the end of WW2, and the American influence on our politics has been deep and pervasive, especially, but not only on our foreign policy.

Our participation in the Korean war, the Vietnam war, the invasion of Iraq, and the war in Afghanistan happened largely or solely because of our relationship with the US. Currently, there is a real danger that we are being drawn into the tensions between China and the US over the South China Sea and Taiwan. Australia's interests should be in peace, not in getting drawn into any conflict between the two competing powers. The environmental costs of war which I address in this submission, are directly relevant for the purposes of this inquiry.

Our involvement in military exercises with the US as a major partner, for example, Talisman Sabre exercises at beautiful Shoalwater Bay in Queensland, are also destructive to the Australian environment while releasing significant amounts of greenhouse gases.

## *Greenhouse emissions from the military and Global Heating*

Australia and the world face the two existential threats of climate and ecosystem catastrophe and nuclear war.

A conflict involving even a few nuclear weapons from the huge arsenals of the nuclear armed powers would lead to a "nuclear winter", with catastrophic climate and environmental impacts. Australia should support the signing of the Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty, but Australia's ties with the US preclude this.

The militarism which is plaguing our society, and which drives us into US led wars which have nothing to do with the defence of Australia or with world peace, diverts us from dealing with these two existential threats.

Furthermore, the military is a huge emitter of greenhouse gases, thereby contributing significantly to global heating. "The United States and its allies have spent trillions of dollars (1.8 trillion in 2014 – Nick Buxton) financing their deadly and destructive wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. These wars have had terrible social, economic and environmental costs and have made global warming much worse. Expensive weapons systems such as fighter jets, destroyers, and tanks are extremely energy inefficient and emit highly toxic, carbon-intense emissions. The U.S. Department of Defense is the largest industrial consumer of fossil fuels in the world." Tamara Lorincz, International Peace Bureau September 2014.

We are facing the prospect of a hothouse earth, with the poorest people around the globe, and in Australia, suffering the most from climate extremes. We are experiencing the sixth major extinction wave of animals from insects to elephants as well as plants, including trees and forests – the oxygen producers and carbon sinks of the world.

People all over the world are suffering - from poor farmers facing drought or floods in Uganda, to communities in Alaska having to uproot totally to escape the melting permafrost and encroaching sea, to Pacific Islanders facing complete loss of their homelands, as do the poor in low lying areas, for example, in Bangladesh or Vietnam.

Global heating will destroy land which humans rely on for their survival. Some areas that now support agriculture or animal husbandry may become uninhabitable or capable only of providing for greatly diminished populations. Under the pressure of rising temperatures and increasingly fierce droughts, the southern fringe of the Sahara desert, for example, is now being transformed from grasslands capable of sustaining nomadic herders into an empty wasteland, forcing local nomads off their ancestral lands. Syria is an example where droughts forced people off their land and into the cities and where repression of refugees led to beginnings of the recent conflict there.

Global heating impacts have the real potential to lead to war, with all of its disastrous human consequences – for example, as happened with the impact of unprecedented droughts in the Middle East. The US is the foremost perpetrator of war in the world today

A large number of environmental organisations compiled this petition below, to the COP26 Climate Change Conference in Scotland in November 2021, emphasizing the importance of military emissions globally. Military planes, tanks, ships and military vehicles use huge amounts of fossil fuels, and the destruction caused by military conflict requires huge emissions in reconstruction. The military is one of the largest institutional greenhouse emitters globally. The Australian Government should support the demands made in this petition -

As a result of final-hour demands made by the U.S. government during negotiation of the 1997 Kyoto treaty, military greenhouse gas emissions were exempted from climate negotiations. That tradition has continued.

The 2015 Paris Agreement left cutting military greenhouse gas emissions to the discretion of individual nations.

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, obliges signatories to publish annual greenhouse gas emissions, but military emissions reporting is voluntary and often not included.

There is no reasonable basis for this gaping loophole. War and war preparations are major greenhouse gas emitters. All greenhouse gas emissions need to be included in mandatory greenhouse gas emission reduction standards. There must be no more exception for military pollution.

We ask COP26 to set strict greenhouse gas emissions limits that make no exception for militarism, include transparent reporting requirements and independent verification, and

do not rely on schemes to "offset" emissions. Greenhouse gas emissions from a country's overseas military bases must be fully reported and charged to that country, not the country where the base is located.

### *Biodiversity and ecosystem destruction from war and conflict*

Nature has always been collateral damage in warfare – including the oceans which have been used as the dumping grounds for nuclear weapons, nuclear waste and ships, as well as of course the land with the animals and plants in areas of conflict, and the atmosphere, which receives the enormous emissions put out by the military.

The film 'The Footprints of War' describes the effects of the half a century old dioxin contamination caused by Agent Orange in Vietnam where 800,00 ha or 14% of South Vietnam's forests were destroyed, on the Canadian coastline a Remotely Operated Vehicle leads us to toxic hotspots on the seafloor, in the Baltic Sea there is a German shipwreck loaded with chemical weapons. Military pollution is everywhere.

The Physicians for Global Survival published a comprehensive report on the impacts of militarism on the environment in 2004 which details the environmental effects of the various types of conventional weapons use, the use of herbicides and defoliants, biological, chemical and nuclear weapons, weather manipulation, deforestation, and biodiversity loss.

I don't need to go further into the details of the horrific impacts of the military and war on the natural environment, - land, air and water - as well as vegetation and living creatures. It is self-evident to those who are paying attention.

### *Conclusion*

I think that the greatest destruction of the total environment which has taken place in wars and from military exercises since WW2 has been largely undertaken by the US military with its allies, including Australia.

Australia bears a considerable responsibility for this destruction, but the best thing that we could do to make sure this doesn't continue into the future is to break our military ties with the US and be a force for peace and diplomacy in the world. [See my submission on foreign affairs and defence for more on that topic].

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this enquiry.

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