

DEFENCE WHITE PAPER 2015

Submission to Department of Defence

Introduction and Overview

1. The Quaker Peace and Legislation Committee (QPLC) is a national committee of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia. This submission represents the considered views of the committee, and is consistent with the principles and policies of the Society in working for a more peaceful world. Our Quaker peace testimony, articulated over 350 ago, affirms the importance of 'taking away the occasion of war' through all our human endeavours - at personal, family, community, national and international levels.

2. We view defence policies as part of a wider approach to how Australia contributes to global challenges, especially those that affect our region. Our vision is for a world where there is peace and mutual acceptance, where conflicts and differences are negotiated, and where people see themselves as global citizens. Australia has much to offer the world in terms of expertise in diplomacy, mediation, human rights, and overseas aid. These skills are needed in greater abundance in international crises. We regard it as essential that the Australian Government give high priority to enhancing resources for this kind of 'soft' power, building on earlier successes in Cambodia, East Timor, Solomons, and Bougainville. The defence forces can be constructive part of this work, if they are put to the service of the civil power in building peace.

Response to Crises

3. We are concerned that policy trends over the past decade indicate a greater emphasis on military responses to crises (in terms of higher priority and expenditure) than the non-military options. A good example of the trend has been the increasing move to involve the military forces in refugee/asylum seekers policies. This distorts the proper role of defence forces by giving them a policing/customs focus, and may undermine the proper humanitarian approach to vulnerable people seeking our help. It also draws the military directly into the partisan political debate.

4. Another example is the current situation in Iraq/Syria, where there has been a lack of clarity in defining the role of our defence forces. The use by government representatives and media of the word 'humanitarian' to include supplying weapons and dropping bombs is potentially dangerous. It not only masks the inevitable outcome of civilian casualties but creates a real problem for those who are working on the ground in a neutral way to give assistance of a non-military kind (e.g. medical, community building). We have seen in the past that this can lead to such workers being detained or attacked.

5. In addition, neither major political party is willing to give Federal Parliament the opportunity to debate and authorize military involvements overseas. As a result, there is a danger that the defence forces will be put into situations where public support at home is lacking and their morale may be adversely affected.

US Alliance

6. The enhanced role of the Pine Gap Defence Facility in gathering information and relaying targeting information to the US indicates a greater intertwining our Australian and US defence forces in war-fighting. A Parliamentary Committee reviewing the Pine Gap treaty in 1999 pointed out that, unlike similar US Congress committees, its members could not gain adequate access to Pine Gap. Professor Des Ball (ANU), an acknowledged expert on Pine Gap, recently raised concern at what he called “ethically unacceptable” work at Pine Gap and called on the Government to rethink its support (*ABC TV 7.30 Report*, 13 August 2014).

7. Another area of concern for us is the increasing arms race in our region, actively encouraged by US arms sales. At a time when there are stronger moves among small and medium powers for banning nuclear weapons, it is disturbing that the P5 countries, and nations in our Asia-Pacific region, are focusing on enhancing their military capabilities (including nuclear stockpiles) rather than seeking a comprehensive approach to disarmament. Australia seems to be taking its lead from the US in its accommodation of US troops in Darwin, its acquisition of new fighter planes, and its willingness to allow Pine Gap to be used as described in the previous paragraph.

8. The time has come for a review of the place of military defence within a more independent Australian foreign policy. If Australia is to build positive and long-lasting relationships in our region, the focus of thinking needs to be on identifying the likely crisis points in economic, social, environmental, and political life, and devising creative approaches. This can then guide government in the allocation of resources towards peacebuilding and humanitarian responses. The most likely result will be more energy being spent on mediation/conflict resolution skills and resources, and on promoting dialogue among the nations of our region. A necessary part of such an approach will be greater people-to-people links, better language training, and a more compassionate approach to refugees.

Australian Defence Force

9. In our view, Australia’s defence forces should give support to humanitarian and peacebuilding operations internationally, especially in our region, as part of a this kind of comprehensive political strategy. They should work as far as possible in co-operation with the United Nations in response to crises (such as pandemics, terrorism or ‘natural’ disasters). They should not acquire equipment that is most suited to involvement in foreign wars at the behest of the USA, and become involved in places where Australia’s interests are minimal and where our understanding of the nuances of local conditions are weakest. Training should emphasise cultural awareness, negotiation, peacemaking and peacekeeping.

10. A feature of the defence forces has been the dominance of a male culture. This has not only led to serious incidents of sexual harassment and abuse, but has given women far too little opportunity to influence strategic thinking. More attention needed to be given to ensuring that women progress to senior levels and are supported by structures and cultures that are open to a wider range of approaches than have traditionally been part of the military system. We are aware, for example, of the success of some women-only military units (used by the US during the Iraq war) in building respectful relations with local people.

11. The impact of war upon soldiers has become increasingly evident in recent years, especially in relation to post-traumatic stress disorder. Bruce Lawford of the Gallipoli Medical Research Institute said on *ABC RN Breakfast* (8 October) that PTSD is a long term condition that can cause brain deterioration. It is essential that the ADF put in place adequate mechanisms and resources to

support returning soldiers, including after they may have been discharged. Assistance could also be offered to the families of those who have served.

Conclusions

12. The Australian Defence Force (ADF) should operate within an integrated and independent foreign policy set by the civil power. The following are features that we would like to see applied:

- Parliament's approval for the engagement of the ADF in war-fighting overseas.
- Priority given to involvements that are authorized by the United Nations and involve peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding.
- No conscription to the armed forces, and no recruitment of people under 18.
- Greater participation of women in decision-making roles within the ADF.
- Phased withdrawal of ADF from border protection, and replacement by a coastguard.
- Increased emphasis on skills of mediation and negotiation in ADF training.
- More resources to assist those returning from war zones, and their families.

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