



## DEFENCE STRATEGIC REVIEW 2022

### Submission by Quaker Peace and Legislation Committee (QPLC) on behalf of Australian Quakers

#### *Summary of Main Points*

1. The major areas of our concern are the expansion of production and export of weapons, increased participation in preparations for war (e.g., RIMPAC, Pitch Black, Pacific Vanguard, Talisman Sabre), the commitment to offensive strategies rather than territorial defence, and the focus on bilateral rather than multilateral relationships. We have reached a stage where the costs of waging war have exceeded the capacity of people and the planet to survive.
2. We have doubts about Australia's official defence and foreign policies, and about the alarmist commentary by some public officials and media to confront China over Taiwan. Public opinion shown in Lowy Institute Poll in 2021 reflected this growing concern. 57% opposed military conflict with China, and 72% said good relations are possible with both US and China.
3. The other major threats facing humanity include environmental crises (shortages of water and food, collapse of ecosystems, pollution, climate change), the increasing production and stockpile of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, the potential for significant ongoing pandemics, and powerful and uncontrolled technology.
4. Australia's support for AUKUS is misplaced and should be reviewed and reversed. Its purpose is contrary to the real needs of defence policy, is too closely linked to US global military strategy, and reduces our capacity for independent approaches. It also increases the likelihood of Australia being drawn into a war with China.

#### FULL SUBMISSION

##### Part 1: Introduction.

- 1.1 The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) has a long history of work for peace at all levels of society and worldwide. This is based on our Peace Testimony which reflects the commitment from the earliest days of the movement to oppose war as inconsistent with the teachings and spirit of Jesus. This has led to ongoing efforts to build peaceful relationships in personal, social, and global spheres of life. Of particular relevance to this submission is the work of Quakers at the United Nations as an accredited Non-Governmental Organisation. Opportunities are made for dialogue among diplomats and other experts, in a private setting that enables open communication and sharing on major issues of the day. In times and places of war, Quakers have offered ambulance and other non-lethal support for those engaged, with concern for the humans involved regardless of their 'side' or role. Conscientious objection to military service has also been a significant feature of our history, and we continue to advocate for the right of conscientious objection to be extended to all countries. **In short, the Quaker approach is summed up by (a) refusal to kill, (b) relief of suffering, (c) building institutions of peace, and (d) removing the causes of war.**
- 1.2 In the Australian context, Quakers have reinforced themes including (a) the importance of defence policy being part of a comprehensive approach to international relations, (b) the priority for defence forces to be engaged in international humanitarian and

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policing work under the auspices of the United Nations or other international bodies, (c) the need for a better balance between the resources allocated for military defence, security and intelligence, and those allocated for diplomacy, aid and development, and (d) the need for active support for international moves for disarmament and stronger international law.

**1.3 In recent years we have emphasized that climate change is one of the most important challenges to the future of the world, and that Australia's foreign and defence policies should focus on how best to respond. We have also promoted awareness of the vital contribution that women can and should make to decisions about defence and foreign policy. We endorse the UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security – that “reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, humanitarian response in post-conflict reconstruction, and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security”.**

1.4 The emphasis of this submission is on the nation's security challenges in the coming decade, in a global context of a renewed Cold War environment. This sets the stage for decisions on the other aspects of the terms of reference, including Defence capabilities, force structure and posture.

## Part 2: The Current Situation.

2.1 In the Australian scene, the following are of concern to us:

- The change of focus from territorial defence to long-range weaponry as part of a strategy to confront China.
- The formation of AUKUS.
- The commitments to NATO, the Quad, the Reciprocal Access Agreement with Japan, and the billion-dollar weapons contract with South Korea.
- The expansion of participation in war preparations such as RIMPAC, Talisman Sabre, Exercise Pitch Black, Ulchi-Freedom Guardian Exercise, Nichi-gou Trident, Malabar, Pacific Vanguard, Arcc-21, and La Perouse.
- The rapid increase in spending on military production and exports.
- The focus on bilateral rather than international relations, and the absence of engagement in UN peacekeeping/peacemaking operations.

Quakers have pointed out that old policies are not working, that preventing war is possible, and that militarized foreign policy is more a problem than a solution. **We have reached a situation when the costs of waging war have exceeded the capacity of the people and the planet to survive.**

2.2 AUKUS is of particular concern, given the very limited information given to the Australian people since it was announced. We believe that this represents over-reach by the Australian government in order to reinforce closer inter-operability with the US military forces. The likely costs (especially of the submarines) are excessive, and the agreement raises the risk of war with China. It also has serious implications for our commitments to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and even ANZUS. It could undermine the Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone, and place Australia on a path of increasing global and regional tension. As Maria Timon of Kiribati said at a

webinar in 2021, AUKUS sends the message that Pacific people are expendable and 'collateral damage'. There is also news of a challenge by China (and possibly others) to the role of the IAEA as a potential accomplice to the transfer of nuclear technology, contrary to its role of preventing such transfers.

2.3 In our view, defence policy is being made without adequate oversight by Parliament and that the decisions about procurement, force structure and posture are being influenced unduly by US strategies, compromising Australia's capacity for self-determination. It is also putting our citizens at greater risk of becoming the target of attack. We have noted that some former military leaders have expressed their own reservations along these lines. Of course, all these military expansions have a significant impact on environmental degradation.

2.4 In addition to the military dimensions, there are numerous threats facing humanity and we list the major ones here:

- The decline of natural resources, particularly water.
- Collapse of ecosystems and loss of diversity.
- Human population growth beyond Earth's carrying capacity.
- Global warming and human-induced climate change.
- Chemical pollution of the Earth system, including atmosphere and oceans.
- Rising food insecurity and failing nutritional quality.
- Nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, and the increasing threat to deploy them.
- Pandemics of new and untreatable disease.
- Powerful and uncontrolled new technology.

The human community has so far been unable to address these issues effectively, and we draw attention to them to emphasise the importance of ensuring adequate financial and human resources to these challenges. This also raises the question of how the Defence Review will take these into account when framing recommendations.

### Part 3: Nuclear Weapons.

3.1 The re-emergence of the nuclear war threat has been a notable feature of the international situation. The war in Ukraine has led to overt threats by Russia to use nuclear weapons, and sends a signal to others that obtaining nuclear weapons may be a good form of 'security'. At the same time, following the recent conference of parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the UN Secretary-General has highlighted "the heightened risk of nuclear weapons being used, by accident or through miscalculation". The nuclear-weapons states continue to build up their systems and ignore their commitment under the NPT to reduce their stockpiles.

3.2 At this time, it is imperative for Australia to set an example to the region by signing and ratifying the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which represents the majority view of countries and people of the world to put a brake on the way things are moving. Yet the moves made by the Coalition government to push Australia's policies in a more belligerent direction have raised the spectre of us being drawn into major conflict that will escalate the risks of nuclear war. The Labor government has so far not changed policies significantly, despite a softer tone in the Foreign Minister's efforts to re-engage with China.

3.3 The other important factor is the Pacific. As many Pacific people have repeatedly said, they have over many years resisted nuclear testing, nuclear waste dumping and climate change. Nic Maclellan, a long-term journalist there, said in October 2021 that Australia underestimates the negative impact of the experience of nuclear testing. The nuclear-free zone established years ago is seen as being compromised by the Australian decision to join AUKUS. Australia should really be giving attention to persuading the US to join the Treaty of Rarotonga.

#### Part 4: Democratic Processes.

4.1 The analyses of many commentators have reinforced our concerns about Australia's approach. For example, Hugh White (ANU) encourages the use of non-military means to engage with China, and suggests that Australia should be using the Alliance as a way of discussing with the US ways in which its policy towards China should be softened. Mike Gilligan (former defence official) has questioned the extent to which the military chiefs are captive to US thinking and are failing to take a more self-reliant view. Sue Wareham (Medical Association for the Prevention of War) has stressed that diplomacy is the only legitimate approach to security concerns, and that international law must be used against war crimes. Joe Camilleri (La Trobe University) has said that lasting peace relies on removing the 'exterminist' thinking which promotes more extreme military responses. Alison Broinowski (former diplomat) has emphasized that public opinion is changing as people see the losses from war increasing, and regard the idea of 'winning' as doubtful. Brian Toohey (journalist) has pointed out that countries of our region have built more balanced and better relations with China than we have, and that China will become a threat to us if we continue on the path of acting as a US proxy.

4.2 We set these comments against the prevalence of a set of views in relation to foreign affairs/defence thinking and policies. Too many 'think tanks' (e.g., the Australian Strategic Policy Institute and the Institute of Public Affairs) are reinforcing the 'status quo' approach of government policies. The result is that there are insufficient alternative views being listened to in government circles. The recent enquiry by the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN) into public attitudes on the US Alliance and aspects of policy on these matters is to be tabled in Parliament soon and will show a significant questioning of these established attitudes to defence. **In addition, the June 2021 Lowy Institute Poll highlighted that 57% of Australians say that in a military conflict between China and the US Australia should remain neutral, and 72% said it was possible for Australia to have good relations with both the US and China at the same time.**

4.3 The limited role of Parliamentary committees on security and defence issues is another aspect of this. We consider that these committees are given insufficient access to vital information on our defence policies and practices, with the result that the Parliament loses its capacity (on behalf of the wider community) to analyse and discuss the trends and concerns. In addition, it seems from recent reports that the two major parties are excluding minor parties and independents from the Joint Intelligence and Security Committee. The War Powers Reform Group has been campaigning to ensure that decisions to engage in military operations overseas are made by Parliament rather than by the Executive alone. See [www.warpowersreform.org.au](http://www.warpowersreform.org.au)

## Part 5: The Military Culture.

5.1 The evidence is increasing that exposure to armed conflict has deleterious effects on everyone involved. In particular, the people recruited to military forces are at risk of severe trauma from such exposure over a long period. The stories that have emerged from the Brereton report on Afghanistan 'war crimes' underline the point that military service places combatants in situations requiring a hardening of feelings and a need to follow orders to attack and kill others. We have been reminded recently of the decision of the Ukrainian leadership to force men between 18 and 60 to stay in the country to fight the war against Russia, thereby denying them the right to choose to care for families or take other non-military responses. Much the same is now happening in Russia with a call-up of many reservists and others.

5.2 At the same time, there is considerable effort put into making war by remote means, using drones and other attack weapons that can be controlled from a safe distance and are likely to have their impact mainly on civilians in areas targeted. So those serving in military forces may be choosing between face-to-face encounters or authorizing remote attacks, with each option having potentially distressing effects on their personal experience. It is alarming that the current militarization in the world is setting up individuals with very difficult decisions that distort their view of life and have a bad impact on those close to them. **From our perspective, this is a dangerous path for humankind, at a time when we need cooperative and collaborative effort based on valuing life and helping each other to share in the benefits of a positive and inter-connected life.**

5.3 The intrusion into the education system of the military is a means of 'normalising' the military approach to life. For example, in South Australia, young people are being encouraged to use their 'gap year' to be paid by arms companies to learn coding as a lead into cyber courses at university. The weapons manufacturers are openly recruiting young people into their industry by making claims such as "Australia's defence industry needs the best and brightest minds in the country" (BAE Systems), and "we improve the lives of those who defend freedom, cultivate the STEM workforce of the future, and strengthen the resiliency of communities where we live and work" (Lockheed Martin).

5.4 Even as the Defence Strategic Review began, media reports indicated that the Australian Defence Force (ADF) was making strong representations for additional human and financial resources from government to be allocated to military defence. **In our view, any such proposals deserve careful examination in the light of the substantial needs for action on climate emergency and species extinction, reducing the arms race, and putting more effort into non-military solutions underpinned by global cooperation.**

## Part 6: Conclusion.

6.1 **The overwhelming need for the survival of humanity and our planet is to reject war as an instrument of policy and to work tirelessly to eliminate its causes.** The extent and complexity of the challenges facing the global community demand a set of policies by Australia that give priority to (a) an integrated foreign and defence policy placed at the centre of executive government decision-making; (b) a greater attention to our commitment to international order through the institutions of the United Nations, the strengthening of international law, and our sharing the burden of climate change, responding to the flow of refugees, and achieving the sustainable development goals; (c) a reset of our framework for external relations to enhance cooperation, dialogue, and positive diplomatic interaction with all nations. The contribution that

women can bring to the task of peacebuilding has been largely omitted in many decision-making places within the national government. This needs to be reversed if we are to benefit from a more comprehensive capacity to make sound decisions.

6.2 It is essential that the government give leadership through rejecting pathways that build tension in our region and beyond, and review its participation in binary groupings of 'allies' pitted against other groups of 'enemies'. In this regard, the current approach to expanding armaments exports is adding to the 'arms race' globally. **The defence of Australia should be the essential goal of defence policy, and the entanglement in long-range strategies to assist the US should be reversed. In addition, Australia should sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and affirm its support for the Nuclear Free Zone in the Pacific.**

6.3 In relation to defence, the following moves are warranted as part of a change in overall policies:

- To restore the clear role of defence as subordinate to the overall strategies of government in foreign relations as a 'good international citizen'. This includes giving Parliament a vital say in any decision to commit military forces overseas.
- To enable Parliamentary committees (e.g., Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, and Intelligence and Security) to have better resources and access to information to examine and question defence-related plans in the context of Australia's position and priorities.
- To abandon the assumption that defence expenditure should be a fixed level of the federal budget, and subjecting all defence allocations to comprehensive scrutiny by estimates committees.
- To re-assess the continuation of special forces, given the abuses of power revealed by the Brereton Enquiry into the SAS; and strengthen the personal support available to members of the ADF to deal with trauma experienced during their service.
- To renew Australia's commitment to international peacekeeping and peacemaking tasks under United Nations direction.
- To give a larger role to the Australian Civil-Military Centre (which has an excellent record in drawing together the resources of the police, military and civilians in responding to conflicts and disasters overseas) to coordinate overseas deployments by defence, police and civilian personnel.

Submitted by,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bruce Henry', with a horizontal line underneath.

Bruce Henry  
Presiding Clerk  
The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia  
18 October 2022