



WATCHING BRIEF 22-5: FOREIGN AND DEFENCE POLICIES: IPAN REPORT

As Quakers we seek a world without war. We seek a sustainable and just community. We have a vision of an Australia that upholds human rights and builds peace internationally, with particular focus on our region. In our approach to government, we will promote the importance of dialogue, of listening and of seeking that of God in every person. We aim to work for justice and to take away the occasion for war.

December 2022

The Independent and Peaceful Australian Network (IPAN) held a conference in Canberra to launch its report on a peoples Inquiry into attitudes to Australia's current foreign and defence policies. QPLC issued a Flutter about this giving basic details of how to access the report. This Brief will explain the main points of the Report and suggest options for reflection and action. It can be used as a study guide.

Background

The Inquiry was initiated by IPAN, a network of faith, community, peace and environmental groups and trade unions. It arose from concerns about the lack of transparency in political decision-making in Australia. It was called 'Charting Our Own Course' and explored the case for an independent and peaceful Australia. The terms of reference covered (a) the costs and consequences of the Australia-US Alliance in relation to social, political, military/defence. Economic and environmental impacts, and (b) proposals for future priorities for foreign policy and alternative defence policies. The response included 283 written submissions from groups and individuals, and comments on a questionnaire IPAN distributed widely. The Inquiry was an opportunity for Australians to express their views on the ways Australia can play a positive role in achieving a peaceful world. The Inquiry focused on 8 broad areas, each with an expert panel leader who compiled a chapter for the Report, emphasizing the steps needed for a genuinely independent foreign policy. Friends can read or order their own copy of the report at: <https://ipan.org.au/read-or-order-the-report-of-peoples-inquiry/>

Executive Summary

Kellie Tranter, a lawyer and journalist who chaired the Inquiry, highlighted the following points in her summary:

- The report imagines citizens placed alongside Parliament at the centre of Australia's defence and foreign policy decisions, in achieving an independent policy through reason, diplomacy and common sense.
- For too long Australia has facilitated US hegemony and engaged in fighting and losing wars for which there is little popular support, and at huge personal and national cost. As a result Australia has lost international standing and respect for our values and domestic governance systems.
- "Australia must decide what it wants in the world, work out how to get there, and take steps to achieve these goals". The report shows various ways in which this can be done.
- War is a choice rather than an inevitability.
- An independent Australian foreign policy would increase the likelihood of resolving trade conflicts through diplomacy and mutual goodwill.
- The proposals put forward in the report would mark Australia as a peaceful nation whose people aim to cooperate with all countries in a multipolar world. The only hope for humanity is a unified spirit of international cooperation.
- This report is a roadmap for the people and governments of Australia.

Eight Areas of Concern

1. **Impact on First Peoples** (convener Terry Mason). The voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are hard to find in the space occupied by Australia-US military involvement. Lack of access to unceded land is usually overcome by manipulation with little concern for health and social impacts, environmental harm, community disunity or sovereignty. Indigenous voices need to be heard. The influx of US troops for lengthy periods adds to pressure on the environment and local facilities and increases the risks of sexual abuse, especially for first nations people. Protection of Aboriginal heritage sites is poor under existing legislation in most States.

2. **Military and Defence** (convener Vince Scappatura). Australia faces a broad array of security risks that require non-military solutions (e.g. climate change, nuclear holocaust, pandemics and global instability). These risks are increased by the Australia-US alliance, especially the costs associated with bloated budgets, climate change, nuclear war, supporting US imperialism, and constraints on Australian sovereignty. The assumption that ANZUS guarantees that the US will protect Australia is undermined by regular US statements that they will intervene only in relation to their own interests. The Australian government has used the 'threat' to US interests to justify increased spending on security at the expense of democracy, and has led us into a series of wars beyond Australia's national interests. It has also integrated Australian military forces into US strategic planning to confront China, leading to violations of international human rights laws and conventions.

NATIONAL QUAKER PEACE & LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

PO Box 6063, O'CONNOR, ACT 2602

E: cqplc@quakersaustralia.org.au

W: www.quakersaustralia.info/cqplc

ABN 16 036 715 933

3. **Foreign Policy** (convener Alison Broinowski). The costs of war are disproportionate in terms of personal and community trauma and the diversion of resources from much-needed global priorities in meeting environmental, social, health and educational challenges. Australia since European settlement has had a predisposition to choose military responses to issues internally ('conquest of Indigenous people') and externally ('fear of invasion'). The AUKUS pact will make Australia even more dependent on the US and less extricable from its wars. False confidence exists that the US will defend Australia. There is increased militarisation of our society, greater defence and armaments spending, and secrecy in policy-making, with little accountability. The submissions to the Inquiry show clear support for a more independent foreign policy that supports international treaties and conventions, discourages autocratic regimes, and seeks friendly relationships with countries in our region.

4. **Political and Democratic Rights** (convener Greg Barns SC). The current system entrenches inequality, precarity, marginalisation and dispossession. There is a trend towards authoritarianism, as evidenced by abuse of power in the prosecution of whistleblowers. Domination of Parliament by the executive branch of government and vested interests must be reversed, and many see the creation of a republic as a way forward. Constitutionally enshrined human rights and a federal anti-corruption body are needed to overcome the lack of independent scrutiny of politicians and security agencies.

5. **Union and Workers' Rights** (convener Jeannie Rea). Armed conflict adversely affects workers disproportionately, through the use of their taxes as finance and their bodies as cannon fodder. Resistance by unions helped defeat conscription legislation in WW1, and there has been ongoing activism by the union movement for peace. Submissions show that there is a strong desire to divert military budgets to improving people's lives and livelihoods. The manufacturing sector has been distorted towards reducing the power of unions, and needs to be extricated from war-making industries in favour of economically sound, just and sustainable jobs. Regulations giving favoured treatment to the production and export of arms to the US have compromised industrial standards, oversight, and academic research.

6. **Environment** (convener Ian Lowe AO). Climate change and destruction of the environment are the results of military action. Increased military spending prevents adequate spending on alternatives to fossil fuels, overseas aid and climate change mitigation. Australia's participation in US-led wars has led to major destruction of environments (e.g. defoliation in Vietnam). Military training in Australia has also had a bad impact on areas like the Great Barrier Reef and other Queensland marine parks. Major resource projects that destroy the environment are initiated for military purposes. The government support for nuclear-powered submarines adds to the list of dangers to the planet and its people.

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7. Social and Community (convener Very Rev Peter Catt). The Australia-US alliance has a harmful effect on the social fabric of our society, and is diverting needed resources from tackling major domestic challenges. Young people especially express concern that Australia is being led into conflict and war because of the Alliance. There is a need to clarify Australia's national interest as no longer isolated and dependent on powerful friends. The media have contributed unduly to pressure for expanding arms production and export by exaggerating threats. Apologies are due to soldiers caught up in overseas wars to which Australia was unnecessarily committed. Relations with neighbouring countries have been poorer owing to a condescending and imperialistic attitude which ignores their focus on climate change. The engagement of arms manufactures from overseas in programs in schools sets a dangerous precedent of 'normalising' militarisation.

8. Economic (convener Chad Satterlee). The Inquiry has been a more comprehensive survey of public opinion than most previous examinations of the Australia – US Alliance. There is no cost-benefit analysis of government priorities in defence, and vested interests have dominated access to information and decision-making. Many Australians are less willing to pay for defence, at the cost of trade and other benefits for the country. The stated aim of government to become a top ten arms exporter is seen as extravagant and undesirable by many, given the other demands upon the budget and the opportunities for greater effort in trade, aid and people-to-people links overseas. Wasteful expenditure on major defence equipment (mainly aligned with US needs and products) is seen as poor economically for Australia.

Recommendations

The recommendations in the Report cover all the areas mentioned and are directed primarily to the government. Here is a summary of them:

- Those relating to First Nations Peoples – (a) action should be taken by the government to protect first nations people from assault perpetrated by members of overseas military forces; (b) the government should give great priority to the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the maintenance of their lands including giving them a dominant rather than subservient position in any negotiations with other stakeholders.
- Those relating to the Parliament and media – (a) legislate to ensure the decision to go to war lies with Parliament; (b) have an inquiry into the role of media in promoting the Australia-US alliance.
- Those relating to defence and security – (a) redefine these concepts to include human security and common security; (b) prioritise the threat of climate change and nuclear war and sign the treaty to ban nuclear weapons; (c) review the ANZUS treaty to ensure it is appropriate; (d) engage in extensive consultations to develop a new defence policy based on territorial defence with spending limits accordingly; (e) eliminate all overseas military presence from military bases in Australia; (f) reduce the commitment to spend 2% of GNP on military defence, and reallocate funds

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for foreign aid; (g) establish an enquiry into the defence industry's social impacts

- Those relating to nuclear weapons – (a) sign and ratify the treaty to ban nuclear weapons; (b) discontinue joint military exercises with US forces; (c) use only warships not propelled by nuclear energy.
- Those relating to diplomacy – (a) shift the focus from national defence to diplomacy to ensure security; (b) strive to use more resources for diplomacy especially with our neighbours; (c) promote the role of the United Nations in maintaining peace and security.
- Those with industry and social effects – (a) redirect budget priorities from war-related programs to socially and environmentally sustainable production; (b) introduce a living wage to build social cohesion; (c) nationalize strategic sectors of the economy.
- Those about democracy and transparency – (a) give Australian citizens a direct voice on the level of defence spending; (b) promote a referendum on a republic to give Australia more independence; (c) give the anti-corruption body full transparency and protection for whistleblowers.
- Those relating to health and environment – (a) work for zero gas emissions including by the military; (b) acknowledge the great damage done to the environment by wars in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan; (c) ensure no exemption from health protocols by overseas military forces, and establish a register of military pollution; (d) apologise to veterans and families of those involved in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan for putting their lives at risk; (e) prohibit military sponsorship of activities for people under 18 years, and have robust policies for requests from military representatives for visits to educational establishments.

The full report, ***Charting our own Course: Exploring the Case for an Independent and Peaceful Australia***, is now available to read or order at <https://ipan.org.au> IPAN is working to get copies into the hands of all federal politicians, and to encourage journalists to write about it. Copies will also be made available to libraries and universities across the country.

Using the Report

The Report is a most valuable resource for peacemakers. It contains up-to-date contributions from a wide range of people throughout Australia, and it shows clearly the strong desire by most of them for a change of approach by our political, bureaucratic and academic establishments. It is also a challenge for all committed to a peace-oriented foreign policy to implement the changes proposed in the Report. And to go further in our advocacy for non-military solutions.

There is scope for widening the dialogue opportunities with our fellow citizens, and for entering the public debate in whatever ways we can. We can present a vision of what is possible, giving examples of creative responses to fear and violence. We need also to practice positive peace in our personal relationships and groups.

Some specific options for follow-up of the Report:

- Gather with others in a study group over an agreed time period to share the Report in detail, identifying the areas for possible action, and devising

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plans for personal and combined steps.

- Focus on a particular strand of the Inquiry, explore it in depth, gathering information and insights from those involved in that area of life. This could lead to preparing audio-visual material to share more widely, and to ideas for advocacy.
- Publicise the Report through newsletters etc and encourage people to get hard copies or on-line versions, then enable the sharing of responses through webinars or workshops.
- Consult IPAN about inviting any of the authors of the Report to an on-line discussion about their area of concern.
- Use social media to draw attention to the Report and its findings, as a way of broadening awareness and generating interactions.
- Make contact with political representatives to make clear your responses to the Report, to ensure they are aware of it, and to put forward action proposals.
- Join organisations that are working for the same kinds of changes as the Report outlines, e.g. United Nations Association, War Powers Reform Group, Pax Christi, Australian Religious Response to Climate Change, aid agencies, human rights and refugee groups, International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), Medical Association for the Prevention of War, Just Peace, Friends of the Earth, War Resisters International.
- Learn about the location and activities of arms manufacturers in your region, visit their premises and make clear your views about their presence.
- Maintain contact with IPAN through joining the mailing list for its regular newsletter 'Voice'. See www.ipan.org.au

Margaret Clark and David Purnell from QPLC will be available for further contact about the Report and its promotion. You can e-mail them at mlclark77@hotmail.com and davidpurnell68@gmail.com

Canberra, December 2022

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