

## WB 16-6 MILITARY DEFENCE – WATCHING BRIEF – AUG 16

*Australia has embarked on a significant expansion of its military capabilities. This Brief looks at issues that arise in relation to the use of military force in current and prospective conflicts, and ways in which checks and balances can be enhanced in relation to decision-making on responding to conflicts.*

### Changing Times

It is a long time since wars were fought by armies confronting each other on battlefields. Declarations of war are no longer even formal in many cases, and violent conflicts can escalate quickly. Peter Rusbridge, a former member of the Royal Navy and the RAAF, has highlighted the following points in an article in *The Canberra Times* on 27 June 2016:

- The war on terror has been going on since 11 September 2001, yet little of the current Australian Defence Force (ADF) is involved. The army's tanks were last used on the Vietnam War, the Navy's submarines have never sunk anything, and the last time the air-force shot down an opponent was in the Korean War.
- Trends in warfare have moved from formal battles, through massive attrition based on artillery, to fluidity and manoeuvre (blitzkrieg), and now to asymmetry, in which the weak can triumph over the strong (e.g. Afghanistan).
- Current warfare emphasizes the moral level comprising anger and hate on one side and isolated outrages against civilians on the other side.
- There needs to be coordination at all levels to meet this new challenge. Police approaches that can de-escalate conflict may be more effective than military escalation of violence. More mobile ground troops will be needed to exert force where appropriate.
- Australia's current defence focus on large purchases of sophisticated aircraft, submarines and tanks will not suit the changing strategic environment.

### Lessons Learned in Britain

The Chilcot Inquiry in Britain provides an object lesson in how current defence strategies in countries like Australia are prone to create worse outcomes than the circumstances that provoke them into war. Sir John Chilcot, in outlining his report on 6 July 2016, said:

- The Inquiry looked into whether it was right and necessary to invade Iraq in 2003, and whether the UK should have been better prepared for what followed. "We have concluded that the UK chose to join the invasion of Iraq before the peaceful options for disarmament had been exhausted. Military action at that time was not a last resort".
- The Inquiry also concluded that the threat posed by Iraq's weapons of mass destruction was presented with a certainty that was not justified, and that the consequences of the invasion were underestimated. The action taken by US and UK

to invade undermined the authority of the United Nations Security Council which was not persuaded of the need for such action.

- The intelligence used to justify the invasion was flawed and was not challenged in any part of the UK government or security agencies. The tragic results of the war were immense, especially for the people of Iraq.
- There should be collective and frank Ministerial discussion to assess risks and options, set realistic goals, and ensure that civilian and military arms of government are properly equipped. "All aspects of any intervention need to be calculated, debated and challenged with the utmost rigour".

## The Australian Experience

James Brown, a former Australian Army officer who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, has written a Quarterly Essay (Issue 62/2016) entitled *Firing Line: Australia's Path to War*. He analyses the way decisions are made about going to war, and finds deficiencies similar to those found by the Chilcot Inquiry in Britain. Here are some significant points:

- Prime Ministers effectively exercise the powers of commander-in-chief and have little regard to any formal legislative declaration, Parliament may subsequently debate the decision, but does not vote for or against it.
- The process usually begins with a request from the UN or an ally, although occasionally it is an initiative by Australia (e.g. Solomons conflict). The National Security Committee of Cabinet may or may not be consulted.
- Those with military experience are few and far between in Parliament and among advisers. This restricts the Prime Minister's capacity to evaluate options for responding to crises. Even the Defence Department has few resources devoted to strategic planning.
- The result is "very few checks and balances" in which the Prime Minister's own biases become the determining factor. Tony Abbott exhibited this clearly with his 'gut' reaction to use disproportionate military force after the shooting down of the Malaysian plane in Ukraine, the kidnap of Nigerian school girls, and the rise of ISIS.
- "What is needed is a new national security council headed by a national security adviser with a role and powers detailed in legislation". Parliament needs committees dedicated to assessing the ADF, the Defence Department, national strategy and foreign affairs – with trained staff advisers. Parliament itself should review any decision to engage in military conflict within 90 days of the decision.

There have been moves for a similar Inquiry into Australia's role in the Iraq war. Following the Chilcot report, a former head of the Defence Department, Paul Barratt, called for an Australian Inquiry. "We need a similar inquiry here," Barratt told *Guardian Australia* (7 July 2016) .... "Chilcot has demonstrated the fragility of the decision-making process to go to war. That fundamental power of the sovereign is left in the hands of one person, the prime minister." Andrew Wilkie MP supported holding an Inquiry, and said: "The Iraq debacle turbo-charged al Qaida and created the circumstances for the eventual emergence of Islamic State. In other words the terrorist danger confronting Australians to this very day is a result of Australia's involvement in Iraq".

But Australia's former chief of army Peter Leahy – who oversaw the army from 2002 to 2008 – said a Chilcot-style inquiry was not needed in Australia.

“Let’s have a discussion not an inquiry around our relationship with the United States, how we decide to go to war and very importantly how we decide every day when we are at war to stay at war.”

## **Defence Spending**

The Defence Budget for 2016-7 includes some significant capital equipment purchases and seeks to increase the total expenditure to 2% of GDP. Mark Thomson of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) spoke at a public meeting on 19 May 2016 about the costs of Defence. He said that between 2000 and 2009 defence spending grew at a rate of 5.3% per annum, largely because of involvements in East Timor, Iraq, Solomons and Afghanistan. Between 2009 and 2016 the growth rate dropped to 1.5% per annum, partly as a result of the global financial crisis and partly owing to delays in meeting the planned expansion of defence capability. The growth rate for the next 10 years is forecast to be 4.3% per annum. However, the actual growth may not reach this level owing to shortages of skilled personnel and delays in purchase of equipment. He also pointed out that the decision to let more equipment contracts within Australia to promote defence industries would, on past experience, increase delays and costs.

Peri Coleman (South Australian Quaker) has made some observations about the decision to build 12 new submarines:

- Prior to the airfare destroyer project, the SA government invested in a ‘common user facility’ at Techport – a shiplift, a rail transfer system and a precinct for shipbuilding suppliers. It was supposed to be available for all users, but it was essentially built for the Australian Submarine Corporation.
- The result is that the shipbuilding facilities do not include lift capacity suitable for larger commercial vessels, thus limiting the contracts to naval vessels and smaller commercial ones. “Perforce the State is corralled into concentrating on winning short-term military projects, which provide irregular employment opportunities”.

## **Quaker Approaches**

The members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia re-affirm the long-held Quaker opposition to war and preparation for warfare. We want Australia to be part of global efforts to build peace based on nonviolent approaches to conflict and crisis. Quakers wish to see an Australian defence policy that is part of a wider approach to international relations - involving diplomacy, aid, trade and a concern for human rights and justice. We plan to examine more closely the nature of the defence and foreign affairs budgets and the ways in which expenditure can be re-allocated for preventive diplomacy, dialogue, peacemaking and peacekeeping purposes. We will seek to define more clearly the protocols by which decisions to go to war are made by the Government and Parliament.

We consider that Australia can advance the cause of peace through supporting nonviolent initiatives, disarmament agreements, strengthening international law, and achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In our own peace activities within and beyond Australia we will seek to raise the priority of peacemaking over preparation for war and, in the words of early Quakers, to “take away the occasion of all war”.

In public submissions on defence in recent years, QPLC has emphasised the following points:

- A defence policy, and the role of the ADF, should be seen as part of a comprehensive set of policies that identify strategic risk and set up ways of minimising that risk. Those threats include wide income inequalities, political and economic dominance, ecological degradation, and economic turmoil. Prevention is the best way to avoid widespread destruction through armed conflict.
- The threat of ecological degradation and its consequences is not significantly appreciated, nor is the danger of further economic crises. These threats are far more significant than a direct military threat to Australia.
- We strongly support the Government's decision to implement a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. This Plan requires monitoring and evaluation of all Defence policies.
- There is a role for the ADF in border protection for immigration and customs, dealing with anti-terrorist and cyber attacks, providing humanitarian and disaster relief, and being part of an international policing force related to an international justice system.
- The reliance on the USA for military purposes is outdated and inconsistent with the preventive and policing means of addressing the strategic risks. We encourage a more even-handed and independent approach to military alliances.
- Our view is that the Government should put more resources and attention towards preventing crises from escalating into violence, use the international system to put in place better ways to achieve this, and work collaboratively with other agencies in the field.

In relation to decision-making about options for responding to crises, more checks and balances are needed within the legislative and bureaucratic parts of government to ensure more opportunities for careful assessment of risks and options before decisions are made to commit the ADF. Suggestions include:

1. The creation of more focused Parliamentary committees dealing with defence and foreign policy, with greater resources of expertise to support their enquiries.
2. A national security committee of Cabinet that includes input from the diplomatic, policing, defence, and environmental arms of government.
3. A requirement that any decision to engage in military actions abroad must be reviewed by Parliament within a set period, and that Parliament have the power to change the decision.
4. A declaration by incoming governments of a commitment to seek non-military approaches first, and to ensure that military responses are indeed a last resort.
5. More resources to strengthen the diplomatic capacity of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to engage in preventive diplomacy.

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