

Quaker Peace & Legislation Committee



WATCHING BRIEF 20-2: AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE REVIEW

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Government priority: to respond effectively to a changing strategic environment, especially since publication of the 2016 Defence white paper. This includes:

- Heightened US-China competition, particularly in our region
- Rapid military modernization, especially in cyber and space technologies and threats
- Emergence and use of potentially disruptive technologies, including cyber-security • Continuing threats of terrorism
- Space technology

Government commitment: to work side-by-side with Pacific neighbours to build a region that is strategically secure, economically stable and politically sovereign.

Defence cost of 2% of GDP not sufficient:

Dr Marcus Hellyer, senior analyst for defence economics and capability, Australian Strategic Policy Institute. The 2020-21 Defence department funding will be 2% of the GDP, over \$41 billion. However, it's not likely to be sufficient.

- Long-term funding model in 2016 Defence white paper is already based on more than 2%. The white paper provided Defence with a fixed funding line out to 2025-26 that is decoupled from the 2% GDP.
- The acquisition and sustainment of military equipment will be bigger and more complex than existing equipment (eg: more sensors, computers, software) and will require more personnel (and training) to operate. For example, the Air Force is replacing a third generation fighter with a fifth generation fighter.
- The 2016 white paper was based on a set of strategic assumptions, including the primacy of United States' military power. Academics, policy analysts and other experts agree that such assumptions no longer hold. Australia may need to develop more defence selfreliance thereby increasing costs.
- Much of Defence's spending is already locked into large local construction programs (such as ships, submarines and armored vehicles). As a result, Defence has limited flexibility to adjust its spending plans to respond to changing strategic situations.
- Historically, Australia has spent over 2% of GDP during times of strategic uncertainty (eg 2.8% during Cold War).

Defence focus: working with regional and strategic partners, deepening relationships with south west Pacific islands many of whom are being actively wooed by China, and relationship building in south east Asia in order to avoid potential security flare-ups and crises.

Australian personnel at forefront of global security effort

- On 25 September 2019, Defence Force Chief Angus Campbell delivered a speech, which ‘warns of climate change prompting more disaster relief effort, as well as more peace-keeping missions, given that climate change has ‘the potential to exacerbate conflict’. The speech also notes that Australia is in ‘the most natural disaster-prone region in the world’ and that ‘climate change is predicted to make disasters more extreme and more common’.
- Regional stability can include supporting foreign governments to quell civil disorder and help resolve long running disputes where law and order has broken down.
- ‘Accelerated warfare’ reflects how quickly the strategic environment is shifting, driven by technology and militarisation, challenges in western democracies and the rise of autocratic leaders.

The region

Hugh White, Emeritus Professor of Strategic Studies at Australia National University.

- China is determined to replace the US as the region’s primary power, and unlike the US it is not distracted by commitments in the Middle East and Europe.
- ‘..there is very little evidence that US policymakers have any clear idea of how they can counter China’s combination of economic enticements and strategic intimidation’.
- Australia should start to plan and build the forces needed to defend ourselves without assistance from the US.
- It is reasonable to build/strengthen alliances with Asian leaders – India, Japan and Indonesia. However, it is prudent to ask if any of these countries would be likely to sacrifice their own relationships with China, possibly turning the region’s most powerful state into a bitter enemy, in order to support Australia?

Australian Space Agency

- Established in July 2018, headquartered in Adelaide. Space Situation Awareness facilities (space surveillance) in Exmouth, WA.
- Primary task is to support the rapid growth of an Australian space industry sector, where commercial sector space leads over government-run space activity.
- Prospective launch sites designed to put satellites into orbit near Nhulunbuy, NT and Whalers Way, SA.

Challenges ahead

John Blaxland, Professor of International Security and Intelligence Studies, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, ANU

- External threats to Australia include: level of foreign interference not seen since the Cold War, cyber attacks, ideological retreat from leadership by the US, religiously and politically motivated violence, conventional and/or thermonuclear war, increased environmental challenges, possible breakdown in relations with Indonesia.
- Australia’s current ‘boutique defence’ force cannot sustain battles of attrition in any substantial conflict.
- Infrastructure investments are urgently needed including: utility of military facilities across Australia’s north, cyber force, domestic and border forces, and an expansive Australian Universal National And Community Service Scheme involving all young Australians.
- Australia should strengthen and deepen ties with Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) members.

Friends’ Actions

Australian personnel at forefront of global security effort

- On 5 December 2019, AYM Presiding Clerk sent a QPLC drafted letter to the Prime Minister. Key points included:
 - A recent report by Asialink has shown that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has reached an all-time low in its funding – 1.3% of the Federal Budget. The level of overseas aid is also at its lowest level – 0.21% of GNI.
 - This is at a time of many international crises that require careful and sustained work in building peace and security.
 - It is especially disturbing that DFAT continues to be subject to the ‘efficiency dividend’ policy of the Government, which ensures an ongoing reduction in real terms in the funds available.
 - We understand that the proposed ‘Pacific Step Up’ announced by the Government will involve a transfer of scarce DFAT resources and people from other essential work, rather than a recognition that an initiative of this kind demands more diplomatic effort and support.
 - The increased funding to Defence, ASIO and ASIS since the September 11th attacks in the USA, has been dramatic (almost 300% for Defence, and over 500% for the other agencies). This seems to us to place undue emphasis on military and intelligence approaches and not sufficient on the steady and long-term work of diplomacy.
 - Aid, trade, and person-to-person links with other nations are basic to Australia’s capacity to make a difference in our region and beyond. ○ We urge a review of the budget for DFAT to ensure that it can undertake its historically vital role for Australia in the international scene.
 - The letter was circulated to the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Australian Greens
- Friends are asked to be aware of these issues throughout 2020.
- QPLC will release related Watching Briefs and monitor opportunities for voicing Friends’ concerns on these matters.

Australian personnel at forefront of global security effort

Operation Title	Location	ADF personnel (about)	Part of international or bilateral operation?	Task
Operation Okra	Iraq and Syria	450	Yes - international	Defeat Islamic State
Operation Highroad	Afghanistan	300	Work with defence civilians	Assist with Afghan National Army officer training
Operation Augury	Philippines	100	With local personnel	Providing high-level training and technical support to help fight against terrorism
Operation Render Safe	Across Pacific including Bougainville and island nations	variable	Ongoing	Assist clearing WW II era mines and other munitions from region
Operation Solania	Pacific	variable	With Pacific Island Forum Fisheries Agency	To detect and deter illegal fishing activity in the region
Operation Resolute	Mainly northern Australia	Up to 600	No	Protection of Australia's northern border and maritime interests, covering about 10% of the world's surface area.
Operation Southern Discovery	Hobart, Antarctica	variable	Australian Antarctic Program	Provide logistic support including 'air bridge' between Hobart and Wilkins Aerodrome in Antarctica
Operation Manitou	Persian Gulf and elsewhere	Up to 10	Embedded within multinational force drawn from 32 nations, including at least one major fleet unit	Promotes maritime security and freedom of navigation in the middle east region (Joint Task Force 633)
Operation Accordion	A range of sites across the middle east,	500		Support ADF operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, including through communications, force support, Investigative Service services.
Operation Aslan	South Sudan	25	UN Mission in South Sudan	Military Liaison, aviation and logistics support, no combat roles
Operation Mazurka	Sinai	27	Multinational Force and Observers in the Sinai	General support
Operation Paladin	Egypt, Israel, Jordan and The Syrian Arab Republic	12	Part of peacekeeping operation	Monitors truce agreed to in 1958 and subsequent agreements