



Quaker Peace & Legislation Committee

WATCHING BRIEF 21-6: AUSTRALIA AND THE ARMS TRADE

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.

July 2021

Watching Brief 17-5 on Australia and the arms trade gave background details of the global arms trade and Australia's moves to enhance its contribution to that trade. It also referred to the UN Arms Trade Treaty of 2013 that sought to regulate trade in conventional weapons and contribute to peace and security. Since then, there have been further investments by Australia in the arms trade, and this Update outlines those and gives some analysis and comment.

Latest Developments

David Hopkins (*Overland magazine*, 2 March 2021) says that the volume of Australia's arms exports has grown since the Government adopted a defence export strategy in 2018 to seek to become one of the top ten weapons exporting countries. In 2019-20 the estimated value of Australian defence export permits was \$5.2 billion, up from \$1.5b in 2017-18.

Other points are:

- Australian-made weapons are advertised through the Australian Defence Sales Catalogue which includes the products of around 170 defence forms.
- Recent purchasers include countries with chronic insecurity, armed conflict, displacement and violence, such as Sudan, Central African Republic, Mali, Somalia, and Democratic Republic of Congo.
- The secrecy surrounding the exports makes it impossible to verify the government's claim to be adhering to internationally-based control provisions. No annual reports are issued, and details of sales are reported by region rather than country.
- There is evidence that some weapons sold by Australia have ended up in places to which they were not intended (e.g., Azerbaijan).
- Australia hosts 38 business entities connected to the largest 15 arms companies, and several former politicians from both major parties are on the boards of some companies.

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- At the same time as the US and some European countries have stopped some arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates because of the war in Yemen, Australia continued to approve exports to these countries.

Land Forces Arms Expo, Brisbane

In June 2021 there was a large exhibition of weapons in Brisbane, co-hosted by the Queensland Government. A report by Miriam Torzillo (The Echo, 11 June 2021) highlighted the following:

- The major companies involved were Thales, Boeing, Raytheon, Elbit, Rheinmetal, and EOS. The equipment shown included tanks, armoured vehicles, ammunition, guns, attack helicopters, robots, missiles, and computer guidance systems.
- Those attending the exhibition were mainly government representatives, defence officials, military procurement managers, senior army officers, and equipment suppliers. They were clearly drawn by the new focus on promoting Australia-made weapons systems.
- There was some disruption to the event (and at a nearby weapons factory) from non-violent protests by various peace and other groups – Just Peace, Wage Peace, Quakers, Peace Convergence, Friends of the Earth, WILPF, and UNAA. Quakers took a coordinating role over months of planning. See <https://www.echo.net.au/2021/06/activists-disrupt-land-forces-expo-in-brisbane/> and www.wagepeace.org
- One protest, involving several Quakers, was outside the Brisbane office of Thales, the weapons manufacturer that supplies weapons that are used to kill West Papuan people. The group was there to report a crime involving Thales supplying the Indonesian Government with these weapons. Two Quakers were arrested for this action and will face court soon.
- Michelle Fahy (4 June) reported that the organiser of the arms fair – AMDA Foundation Limited – has charitable status in Australia. She says: “Several of AMDA’s arms-maker sponsors have supplied their weaponry to the two countries leading the coalition fighting the war in Yemen – Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The UN has been pleading for years for countries to cease supplying weaponry to these countries”. See <https://www.michaelwest.com.au/landforces-brothers-in-arms-how-a-weapons-peddler-qualified-for-charitable-status/>

There is to be another arms trade fair at Avalon in Victoria in 2022. Friends may wish to work out how to take nonviolent action in cooperation with other groups at that time.

The Arms Trade Treaty

The Treaty seeks to establish the highest possible common international standards for regulating the international trade in conventional weapons, to reduce human suffering, and promote transparency and responsible action by states.

- There are now 110 states parties (including Australia), plus 31 who have signed but not ratified. China was a recent signatory, but the US is still to join formally. There is to be a conference of states parties in August this year in Sierra Leone.
- Like other international agreements, the treaty can be enforced mainly by people holding governments to account. In Australia, the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade has oversight of the treaty.

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- The most recent report about 'Australia's Defence Industry and Exports' was published in December 2015. It is time for a further review to respond to the Government's strong moves to promote arms production, imports and sales.
- The Global Peace Index for 2021 reports that global militarisation has increased over the past two years with more countries increasing military expenditure and their armed services personnel rate. The economic impact of violence is seen as due to an increase in global military expenditure by 3.7%.

Recent Government Announcements

There has been a flow of government announcements to back up its commitment to the defence industries as part of the overall plan to enhance defence/arms production and sales:

- \$10m for industry jobs in WA via traineeships for school graduates.
- \$34m to boost WA economy in infrastructure to modernise army and air force vehicles.
- 16m to boost Tasmanian infrastructure to modernise arm and air force vehicles.
- \$100m to boost the Queensland economy via defence infrastructure.
- A new program called 'Women in Defence Expo' to enable women to engage with the Defence Force about career opportunities in the Northern Territory.
- Creation of an on-line jobs portal for work in the naval shipbuilding program.
- Grants of a total of about \$1m for small businesses involved in the defence industries.
- \$65m in contracts for SA companies involved in the new Hunter Class Frigate.
- \$10m helicopter contract expansion in NSW to support the Navy's fleet.

For fuller details – see Media Releases of Minister for Defence:

<https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/news-media/media-releases>

WILPF Research

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) has published (May 2021) a research paper on Militarisation in Australia: Normalisation and Mythology. This draws attention to the links between the ever-increasing expenditure on Defence, the defence industry and arms exports. It makes these points:

- The Defence White Paper in 2016 signalled a significant change in emphasis by introducing deterrence and regional competition as central strategic themes of Defence policy. This was extended in 2020 to emphasise enhanced capabilities.
- As Defence influence on the private sector grows, it enlists the public in support of further militarisation by legitimising increased procurement in the public sector. Australia has thus become one of the four largest importers in the world.
- The domestic military supply-chain currently comprises over 3000 Australian businesses and indirectly supports 15,000 additional businesses.

For further details see www.wilpf.org.au

Possible Responses

The emphasis on defence industry and exports is intended to gain public support, partly by creating local industrial capacity and employment, and partly through extensive advertising of the importance of the Defence portfolio. There seems to be little attention to monitoring the kinds of

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equipment and tactics being used to increase exports. Given that Australia had a significant role in creating the international Arms Trade Treaty, the government and parliament show remarkably little concern about whether current policies are compatible with the Treaty.

Contact with politicians can focus on:

- (a) Asking questions about why there has been such an increase in the arms trade by Australia, and
- (b) Emphasising the importance of creating more stringent monitoring of the defence exports program.

For further ideas about contacting politicians, see the Quakers Australia website at <https://www.quakersaustralia.info/peace-action-resources>

Canberra, June 2021

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