Armed Neutrality — Australia’s Alternative

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Introduction

Armed neutrality is a policy to promote the safety and greater independence of Australia. It would seek to replace an entangling nuclear alliance, and the tutelage to which we traditionally submit, with the conduct of our foreign relations, with self-reliance. It demands the discarding of outdated attitudes; almost a new way of thinking. The implications of armed neutrality go far beyond the matter of defence.

In the past many Australians have felt that their country was too weak and needed protection. If this was ever true, it is not true now. In the nuclear age this unnecessary dependence - today it is on America - threatens to cause us losses far greater still than those terrible ones which we suffered previously.

Armed neutrality would not mean Fortress Australia. It is not isolationist or selfish; it does not turn away from the problems of others. It is no ideological straitjacket. It would neither militarise nor impoverish our society. Armed neutrality would broaden the basis for peace in Australia and so advance the struggle for peace in the world. It is feasible and achievable.

How does armed neutrality differ from non-alignment?

Non-alignment: In theory non-alignment is a more unconfined policy than armed neutrality. Non-alignment has no specific legal status. It tries to link in a loose association countries which desire liberation from big-power dominance and economic backwardness, which they share. Non-alignment aims at making the United Nations more responsive to the needs of Asia, Africa and South America. It stands for universal disarmament.

In practice, however, it does little for peace among the non-aligned countries themselves. At present 42 bloody conflicts rage in or among them. Between 1945 and 1980, in the so-called Third World (ruled mainly by dictatorial regimes) some 25 million people died in war. The Third World spends over a quarter of the world’s huge arms bill. A neutral Australia would strive for close friendship with the non-aligned, and with all countries, but it cannot, by an act of will, turn itself into a Third World country with a matching outlook.

Armed neutrality: Neutrality is a status recognised under international law. It is divided into transient and permanent neutrality. The former can be followed by states anxious to stay out of a given war, as Turkey and Spain did in World War II, or by a state, like Laos in 1962, which agrees to ‘neutralisation’ in order not be embroiled in wars fought, directly or by proxy, by stronger powers. This is a non-permanent buffer neutrality established for a specific purpose.

Permanent neutrals, such as Sweden, Switzerland, Ireland, Austria and Finland, must stay out of all wars. They must follow policies in peacetime that enable them to do this. In a sense respect for their neutrality is guaranteed by international recognition, but experience has taught these countries not to place undue reliance on such pledges. The less it needs guarantees, the stronger neutrality is.

The rights and duties of permanent neutrals were defined in their essence by the Fifth and Thirteenth Conventions of the Hague Peace Conference of 1907, amended under the 1949 Geneva Convention.

Above all, permanent neutrality must be ‘plausible’. It must be effective and reliable in order to add an element of stability to relations between states. It is no more completely rigid than anything else in international life, but it should be unbreakable and uncapitulated. The point beyond which a neutral cannot be pushed must be clear and insisted upon.

A permanent neutral cannot join military alliances. To adhere to them in peacetime would destroy the ability to be neutral in war. It should not join economic groupings which it would have to defend with arms. (This has not kept Ireland, Europe’s youngest neutral, out of the EEC, since it considers it can exercise a veto under the Treaty of Rome.)

A permanently neutral country must not allow foreign bases on its soil, except for United Nations peace-keeping purposes. It must accept no obligations of any kind which could impair its neutrality in war. A neutral may not permit war supplies to be exported from, or transported across, its territory, but any restrictions must be applied equally to all belligerents. Neutral governments must not subsidise belligerents or their military purchases. Economic neutrality exists only in so far as a neutral government must not intentionally support the military machine, or politically motivated measures, of one belligerent against another.

Belligerents must respect, on land, sea and air, a neutral’s status. Neutral ships may not be searched or seized. Belligerent warships and their prizes are not banned from neutral waters or ports, but they can be if they indulge in actions damaging to a country’s neutrality.

Neutral countries must not influence their own communication media so as to permit belligerents or potential belligerents to manipulate public opinion. Thus, democratic countries which protect intellectual freedom are the ones best able to practice permanent neutrality.

If a neutral country becomes a victim of aggression, it does not have to turn the other cheek. Indeed, if such a country neglects to defend itself it breaches its own neutrality. Likewise if it neglects defensive preparations. Why? Because a negligent neutral could offer a territorial or other advantage to a warlike party. If attacked, a neutral country may seek military support from wherever it wishes. It does not have to sacrifice itself on the altar of neutrality.

Neutrals do not imagine that they can defeat a superior aggressor. Rather, they aim at being strong enough to inhibit attacks by making the price of success too high. ‘If you hurt me, you’ll get hurt more than the result for you will justify.’

A map showing the neutral countries, Switzerland and Austria. Both countries are surrounded by powerful neighbours.
### COMPARISON OF AUSTRALIA AND TWO ARMED NEUTRALS

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Switzerland</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population (in millions of people)</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landmass (in square kilometres)</td>
<td>41,288</td>
<td>449,793</td>
<td>7,682,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military size at full strength</td>
<td>640,000</td>
<td>800,000</td>
<td>107,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscription</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age during which there is a military obligation</td>
<td>19-49</td>
<td>18-47</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military mobilisation time</td>
<td>48 hrs.</td>
<td>72 hrs.</td>
<td>14 days to call up regular reserves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raw materials availability</td>
<td>90% come from abroad</td>
<td>Rich in raw materials but heavily dependent on imported oil</td>
<td>Rich in raw materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of federal budget:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>20.2% (US$ 1780 million or about 1.8% of GNP in 1982-83)</td>
<td>8% (US$ 3220 million or about 3.5% of GNP over last 10 years)</td>
<td>10.4% (US$ 4895 million or about 2.9% of GNP in 1981-82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare/Health and Social Affairs</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and Research</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of neutrality</td>
<td>More than 170</td>
<td>More than 170</td>
<td>—</td>
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Source: David Martin, *Armed Neutrality for Australia.*

Article 43 of the UN Charter provides that the Security Council may call upon member states to apply economic, diplomatic and military sanctions against a peace breaker. Article 2 compels them to give the world body ‘every assistance’. In principle no member can evade this obligation. But under Article 48 the Council can call for supportive action by ‘all the members’ or by ‘some of them’, which offers a legitimate avenue of escape. (Every neutral in the UN has loyalty imposed sanctions when demanded.) Additionally, all six permanent members of the Security Council must agree to any decision taken. Each always finds a proxy when its own involvement in a dispute bars it from voting.

It is most unlikely and has never happened that both superpowers would agree to demands that could trouble the neutrals. It is highly improbable that another war like the Korean one could be waged under the United Nations flag. Even in that war the Arab countries and Indonesia stayed neutral.

### Can Australia afford armed neutrality?

The question must be answered in the context of what it would buy for us. This country suffered a total of over a quarter of a million casualties in the two World Wars, including more than 86,000 dead. Perhaps we can learn from the experience of countries that have a policy of armed neutrality.

Despite the fact that Sweden and Switzerland — but especially the latter — are surrounded by powerful neighbours who have made war in every generation, both countries have escaped the blood bath for over 170 years. Their societies have not become Prussianised, although both practise conscription (like all European neutrals, save Ireland) and in an ultimate emergency can mobilise about 10 per cent of their populations as trained reserves.

This does not seem to overburden them economically. Switzerland, which has to import the bulk not only of its food but of its arms, now spends a little under three per cent of its Gross National Product on defence. Sweden, which produces roughly 90 per cent of its military requirements, has, over the last decade, spent around three and a half per cent of GNP on defence.

The current figure for Australia, which produces only between 40 and 45 per cent of its own military needs, is a fraction below three per cent. Much of what is not imported from abroad is manufactured here under foreign licence, or with the aid of an offset program.* From this, however, we gain little by way of know-how.

*In order to encourage a country like Australia to make major military purchases, a supplier country sometimes agrees to partially offset the purchase price and foreign exchange requirements by accepting a certain amount of simpler military hardware manufactured in Australia.
Sweden's neutrality is based on a shrewd and flexible formula: 'Non-participation in alliances in peacetime, aiming at neutrality in the event of war.' It wants no external guarantees. Swedish neutrality is not anchored in the constitution. Switzerland's is, and other nations have formally recognised its status since 1815.

Sweden, Finland and Austria treat conscientious objectors liberally, Switzerland less so. The military service periods in the neutral countries are short: less than one year, initially. There are re-training and manoeuvre courses. Switzerland really has a militia. Its standing army is remarkably small: only about 4,300 men. The annual training call-up effects around 30,000 conscripts, and in Sweden around 50,000. Each country has about 800 tanks and between 400 and 450 aircraft. Sweden builds many of these at home.

Swiss and Swedish neutrality has been threatened more than once. In the Second World War, Switzerland was at least as heavily mobilised as any belligerent. Its neutral stance grew still firmer when Nazi Germany's star began to wane. Sweden, having been invaded, had to construct a bloc of Scandinavians, had to grant certain transit facilities to German troops in 1941. Earlier, during Finland's 'winter war' with Russia, Sweden's neutrality was very pro-Finnish. But it is not true that economically Sweden profited unduly by not joining the Atlantic Alliance.

Ireland, too, having been regarded as neutral since 1937, two years later 'bent' its neutrality in favour of Britain. Irish neutrality does not rest in the constitution. The country is in the European Common Market, differing in this from its co-neutral, who mostly have links with either the European Free Trade Association or the Coal and Steel Community, or both. Some people would consider Ireland's neutrality indirectly protected by the United Kingdom.

Finland's permanent neutrality resulted from having lost two wars against the USSR, the second fought in league with Germany. It is secured by a treaty with the Soviet Union which obliges both parties to render each other assistance, forbids them to enter alliances directed against each other, and would compel Finland to resist the passage of forces through its territory with hostile intent to Russia. But Finland, while not allowed the heaviest arms, is probably strong enough to deter aggression from the east as well. Finnish neutrality is not as narrow as is often thought. The country buys arms from NATO as well as Warsaw Pact sources. It co-operates politically and economically with neutral Sweden and neutral Norway and Denmark in the Nordic Council. It appears more free to conduct its own foreign policy than those Central American countries that incur Washington's displeasure.

Austria's neutrality is patterned on the Swiss model. It came into being in 1955. It is enshrined in the constitution and defined in the State Treaty which Austria signed with the victorious powers. This rules out unification with Germany and any propaganda favouring it.

Austria had to choose between neutrality forced on it by occupation and neutrality gained by self-reliance limited by geopolitical reality. The national territory is small. With six frontiers, Austria occupies one of those fatal cross-roads of history. One may speak here of buffer neutrality without slight. Since Austria, by dint of clever diplomacy, has turned it to advantage, Austria has gained economically and enjoys greater domestic harmony.

In 1981 Austria allocated to defence about 2.7 per cent of the budget, as against 13.4 per cent to education, research, science, art and culture, and 23.1 per cent to health and social security.

No modern neutral sacrifices social progress to military expenditure. Except in Sweden, taxation is no heavier than with us, but Sweden, much more than Australia, is a genuine welfare state.

The permanent neutrals, in the spirit of the United Nations, exercise strict control over what arms they sell to whom. When Australians fought in Vietnam, Sweden embargoed the export of anti-tank shells to us.

There are other neutral countries. Burma claims that status. But in outlook and social structure Australia is closer to Sweden and Ireland.

If survivors' guilt is a malaise of neutrality, as some detractors claim, Australia would do well to catch it. It is better than mourning for the slain.

The stronger of the neutral nations have economies well integrated with their defence effort. They are also prepared for psychological defence to keep their liberty.

Strategically, all of them are more exposed than a neutral Australia would be. Yet none finds it necessary to equip itself with nuclear arms. Each one relies on conventional weapons. They know that they cannot impose their own policies, that they cannot defend others, and that their defences are inadequate. Another important factor which they have in common but do not share with Australia is that they believe that they can look after themselves, even in our perilous world.

'Just as nations have no permanent enemies but only permanent interests, so also they do not have permanent allies. Saturday's devil is Monday's saviour'.

— David Martin, Armed Neutrality for Australia, p. 44.

But does not the experience of Belgium and Holland prove that armed neutrality can fail?

It does. Armed neutrality fails when the essential preconditions do not exist, that is, when a country is strategically, economically and in other ways so weak that it has to rely on foreign guarantees which, in a crisis, may prove worthless.

This happened to Belgium in 1914 and 1939, and to Holland in 1940. Both kingdoms, hemmed in by strong, mutually hostile powers (each of which at various times threatened their inviolability) have inadequate natural defences. Those of Belgium's guarantors which became its eventual allies, could afford it no useful help. Norway's case, with some qualifications, was similar.

It differed too long between transient and permanent neutrality. Psychologically and materially it was ill-prepared to emulate Sweden in the '40s, though at times there was a chance that it could have done so. Norway still risks getting the worst of both worlds by trying to have the best of each. It does not wish to provoke Russia by allowing nuclear weapons and foreign troops on its soil in time of peace, but it is a full member of NATO.

Another thought about guarantees: any nuclear-free zone, that for its safe functioning would have to depend on the good will of the superpowers (which seems unavoidable), would probably have to repeat the Dutch and Belgian experience — which showed the uselessness of guarantees.

For armed neutrality to be viable a degree of national cohesion and a willingness to make timely sacrifices are essential. But material circumstances must favour it too.
In that sense Australia is fortunate. It would enjoy advantages no other neutral can boast of. Contrary to zealously fostered and still popular misconceptions, our strategic position is exceptionally good. This is not disputed by military specialists. Parliamentary Committees on Foreign Affairs and Defence have often stressed that Australia does not, in the foreseeable future, face major invasion threats. These would be vastly difficult to mount and sustain. There is agreement that we are well placed to meet those threats, mainly of minor and medium level, which we may possibly encounter in our own environment. Our long coastline is in fact one of our greatest assets.

A contemporary attacker, to be successful against uninspiring opposition, needs at least a three-to-one superiority. An intending conqueror would have to bring here, across wide oceans where they would be vulnerable to attack from the air and by shore-based missiles, nine or ten heavily equipped divisions. Having landed, presumably at widely dispersed spots, they would have to cross huge distances of open and inhospitable country to come even within proximity of any vital objectives.

Nuclear weapons are the least suitable for deterring the threats that might face us. Tactically they are useless against small groups of widely dispersed assailants. Because of our uniquely high urbanisation we would be incomparably more vulnerable than any country within ballistic missile range. We could not afford to continually expand and update the small nuclear stockpile which we might build. To try doing so would destabilise our proper defence effort, divide this country and provoke our neighbours to enter the nuclear weapons race, which not one of them now seems keen on, despite contrary rumours occasionally floated in our press. Result? An interminable, suicidal competition.

Neutral Australia, outside the nuclear web, would not be threatened by a superpower assault. We have nothing which such a country could not obtain by trade. Remote Australia would be so far down the list of ‘desirable fronts’ — much further down than Sweden or Switzerland — that to see it so threatened is pure fantasy.

The other nightmare, that our dark-skinned neighbours, crowded in their hungry millions, yearn to grab our country, thinly occupied by white intruders, should also cease to haunt us. Overpopulation is their worst strategic handicap. Our high ratio of resources to inhabitants is our most valuable military asset. But a neutral, good-neighbourly Australia would be less an object of envy than a factor of stability in Asia and the Pacific. As that fine historian, Sir Keith Hancock, has written — such stability should commend itself to the Americans too.

No foreign protector can make us safe. Like distant Spain, Portugal, Holland and Britain, so also the USA will one day withdraw from our region. We alone cannot withdraw. We will be a target for attacks only so long as we act on the notion that we are somebody else’s permanent unsinkable aircraft carrier, and play host to bases which, because they are a threat to others, threaten also ourselves.

Foreign submarine fleets would endanger a neutral, hence nuclear-free, Australia more than they do Sri Lanka or Madagascar. The same applies to our famous ‘life lines’. And why should a neutral Australia’s oil supplies be more at risk than those of, say, Mauritius, quite apart from the fact that we are fairly close to self-sufficiency?

Australia, so rich in raw materials and energy resources, with its ports located far apart on three oceans, would be one of the world’s hardest countries to blockade.

Can Australia become more self-reliant in defence?

Our defence industries have run down but could be improved at no crushing cost. Without aiming at being self-supporting we should strive to maximise local research, know-how and production. A rise of approximately one per cent, allocated to defence and defence support from GNP, would go far to meet our rather modest needs.

We are already reasonably self-sufficient in munitions and in steel; our resources in heavy engineering are broadly adequate, but not for defence alone. With, without undue strain, produce small aircraft, submarines and missiles. High technology industries have been neglected. Past experience shows that we could provide better for ourselves than we do at present. Today we build no bicycles or motorbikes; forty years ago we built tanks.
‘If the United States is entitled to hold and operate its installations at North-West Cape, Pine Gap and Nurrungar against the will of the Australian government and people, we are no longer a sovereign and independent nation. We are nothing more than a “client state”, a strategic outpost of America’s military might. I refuse to believe that we have sunk so low as that’.

— Sir Keith Hancock, Canberra Times, 8 September 1980.

A properly thought-out scheme for our overall defence would embrace a suitable strategic doctrine, unified command and force structures, and civil defence training involving both sexes, coupled with a substantial effort in public education and psychological preparedness. Long-range industrial and fiscal planning is also important to defence. Why should these things scare us? They have helped the existing neutrals to guard peace for themselves and to advance it for others.

In Australia the often met with hostility to any military effort in peacetime, particularly among anti-establishment traditional radicals, plays straight into the hands of the most conservative conservatives. The latter imply, soothingly, that yes, so long as we can sit happily under America’s nuclear cover we really don’t need to do much for ourselves. If persisted in, this ‘cheap’ alternative will prove the costliest of all. Those radicals who will not countenance conventional continental defence for Australia while it retains its capitalist structure, do in fact lend strength to the forward defence concept* which carries a nuclear component.

The advocates of other alternatives, such as unilateral disarmament or unarmed neutrality, face a similar tragic dilemma. They ignore the quite fundamental popular desire, cutting across all social boundaries, to see the country defended and kept occupied. Both attitudes are self-defeating.

Save to fanatical doctrinaires on each side, armed neutrality, as such, is neither capitalist nor socialist. To have peace Australia must be neutral, to be neutral it must be armed.

What about our closest friend and neighbour, Papua New Guinea: where does it fit in?

Ideally, PNG should be encouraged to become a co-neutral with Australia to form an Australasian Neutrality Zone. It might include New Zealand, whose Social Credit Party already has armed neutrality in its platform.

Together with PNG we should seek to sustain friendship with Indonesia and keep the border with Irian Jaya peaceful. But PNG has its own policy aims which may not coincide with Australia’s. It has sent soldiers to support Vanuatu’s independence. For a neutral Australia actively to sympathise with that is one thing, to be drawn into military involvements in the name of the anti-colonial struggle would be quite another.

There is, however, a more positive side. Papua New Guinea, a respected member of the United Nations, is not isolated East Timor. We could not continue the Australia-PNG Regional Defence Cooperation Agreement, but we would have ready, close by on our soil, forces that would give pause to any aggressor and which could quickly intervene under UN auspices. Unless short-sighted groups here egg it on to risky adventures, PNG is better able to defend itself than those people imagine who only look at numbers and ignore logistics and terrain. Trying to conquer, or even invade, the country from Irian Jaya would be a formidable task. Even were it to succeed (a most unlikely event) Australia’s strategic situation would still remain far stronger than Sweden’s or Switzerland’s.

A non-neutral PNG could still closely cooperate with us politically, diplomatically and economically, as Sweden, Finland, Norway and Denmark do in their Nordic Council.

What armed forces do we possess now? How strong should they be for a neutral Australia?

Our regular forces number between 73,000 and 75,000. With all our reserves (in which the drop-out rate is high) the total is about 107,000. Today we could not muster more than six under-strength battalions. One year after mobilisation we might, with luck, have one single division ready for action. In round figures we have a quarter of the number of tanks and planes which Sweden has, or Switzerland. Our navy is numerically inferior to Sweden’s in important departments, for instance submarines. Our artillery is largely outdated.

For what they are, our small forces are good. But they could not expand rapidly enough to deter a developing threat. They could cope only with emergencies on the most modest scale. Immediately available, sustained combat-capacity might be just adequate to oppose minor lodgements. An emergency which would demand only 5,000 lightly armed ‘availables’ would stretch us too far. To resist an attack in multiple division strength we would need a warning time of four years or more.

Australia’s forces lack three basic essentials. First, a structure designed with enough flexibility to meet the challenge of continental defence. This is because they have traditionally been intended for action as far away as possible from our shores, as auxiliaries to larger allied contingents. Second, they don’t have the trained reserves to give them a surge capacity against hostile escalation, such as can happen and upset the most careful predictions. Lastly, if we had these reserves, our present forces could not effectively integrate them. (Which is why the 1983 election promise by Malcolm Fraser, to draft 10,000 youths into the army to combat unemployment, was so irresponsible: such a draft could have crippled the army.) We lack, too, a defence doctrine suited to our actual needs.

*Forward defence is a policy which uses overseas bases, e.g. Butterworth, Malaysia, to establish a line of defence away from the Australian continent. This policy also includes strengthening the military forces of buffer states. Continental defence, on the other hand, is a policy of defending Australia at its territorial boundaries.

‘Australia needs no outside guarantees to be effectively and permanently neutral. Unlike Austria, it is no buffer. No country needs its territory, as it may need Finland’s, to threaten another’s security. Australia’s borders are less vulnerable than Sweden’s; Australia’s resources richer than Switzerland’s. It could be as independent as it is possible for any political entity to be’.

— David Martin, Armed Neutrality for Australia, p. 114.
What are those needs? In Australia large, old-style, conventional armies could not be sustained far from their bases with long communication lines in featureless country. There is no threat which should tempt one to create such expensive dinosaurs. We require highly mobile forces with autonomous capacities and good long-range fire-power. Fortunately, military technology is beginning to favour such units. Weapons are becoming lighter and some actually cheaper. There is now no tank which cannot be knocked out by hand-held arms, no plane or battleship immune to self-targeting or precision-guided missiles. New fuel-air explosives are adding to the punch of well-trained defenders. Our forces should have a known capacity for quick mobilisation and expansion: this is the best deterrent. These qualities, combined with technical excellence, would force potential aggressors to overmatch us in departments of our, not their, choosing— a slow and expensive business. Thus deterrence becomes selective and can be staggered in our interest.

**Would we have to have conscription?**

No, since we don’t need million-strong forces to confront superpowers. In this, too, we are luckier than Sweden and Switzerland. Modern defence thinkers estimate that from 150,000 to 250,000 properly trained reserves are what we want.

We could get these by adopting the *Voluntary Latent Service* system, first detailed by Dr Ross Babbage. It relies on the voluntary annual enrolment of approximately 20,000 to 30,000 carefully chosen and well-paid volunteers. They would undergo intensive training—not of uniform length, since different specialties demand different schedules—and return for updating courses in succeeding years. They would then become militarily trained civilians, a democratic, semi-professional militia. They would be under contract to answer a call-up within 14 days.

If they remained ‘on tap’ for five years, we would have reserves of 150,000, if for eight years, 240,000, to flesh out our small standing army. The personnel would be sufficiently well paid and trained in specialties to make the service attractive to highly motivated people. The system would be adaptable, affordable, and easy to run. Training costs would be higher than now, but not if measured against the returns. There would be no rejects or drop-outs.

Mr Hayden, when Shadow Minister of Defence, spoke in favour of this system, as he also did of Continental Defence. But that remains a dream while our actual defence is still structured to fit into the American nuclear mesh, which in turn implies forward defence. People cannot be educated towards self-reliance while Australia continues to be the spare wheel on someone else’s war chariot. This is not to deny that we are beginning to make some progress in new military thinking and planning.

**Security from US bases, or from armed neutrality?**

Readers who wish to know more about the functions of the American bases in Australia (allegedly but not in fact jointly controlled) are referred to *Peace Dossier 1*, by Dr Desmond Ball. Here we can merely summarise. In April 1984 Foreign Minister Hayden officially conceded that there are ‘facilities on Australian soil which I view as nuclear targets, one at least in my assessment is a high priority nuclear target, and perhaps the others important targets’. This contradicts frequent assertions that bases like Pine Gap, North West Cape and Nurrungar—but there are a great many others— have no actual war significance. But even if it were true that all the bases only survey Russian communications and military dispositions, this in itself would be a hostile act. It would not support deterrence or a stand-off between Russia and America. How would Australians respond if the USSR openly maintained high technology bases in Indonesia to spy on our forces? Pine Gap and Nurrungar provide vital data to fight a nuclear war, down to the tactical level. The satellite intelligence which the bases process makes possible the precise locating of distant targets and the monitoring of the course of missiles—and most probably also interference with them. Nurrungar could help target missiles, lasers and particle beams. Pine Gap could help to direct anti-ballistic space-war weapons. Together the bases give sharper sight and hearing to the world’s most advanced nuclear war machine. Incidentally, they also intercept communications and conversations inside Australia.

American submarines in the Indian and Pacific Oceans are soon going to be fitted with missiles that could draw them into a first-strike exchange because they can hit Soviet ICBMs in their silos. To improve communications with such submarines, to be able to give them firing orders and direct their attacks, makes the bases themselves important first-strike targets, an added reason being that, sited on land, they are easier to hit than submarines.

The US government will spend SUS 126 million on further upgrading the Nurrungar satellite base. Dr Ball estimates that, depending on wind direction, a one-megaton ground-burst there could kill more than 10,000 people in Port Augusta, Wyalla and Port Pirie, and inflict radiation sickness on up to 90,000 others.

Australians are still not being told what the bases really do. Mr Hawke’s information, supplied during June of 1984, adds almost nothing new. The most sensitive sections of the bases are still run exclusively by Americans.

Australia has almost no influence on American policy making. If our chief ally stumbles into war in the northern hemisphere, we would most likely have to be plunged into a universal holocaust. Nor could we escape if America went to war in the Middle East. There not

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Swedish soldiers are unionised and sit on Regimental Councils. Copyright: Swedish Defence Ministry, Stockholm.
even Washington is a free agent, because the Jewish vote in New York, which is of enormous domestic importance, especially before elections, can exercise a veto over any foreign policy action of interest to Israel. The theory behind the bases is that the country which has them negotiates from strength — supposedly for peace. An illusion! When the 1st Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty limited anti-ballistic missiles to 200 for each side, this speeded up the race for high-technology offensive weapons, with the result that re-entry vehicles (MIRVs) now carry seven or more warheads, each independently targeted.

This has led Richard Butler, Australia’s Envoy for Disarmament, to say (June 1984) that if only 20 out of the world’s stockpile of 60,000 (repeat: 60,000) nuclear warheads were used in a certain pattern, the earth as we know it, and its environment, could probably be destroyed. Since SALT, Russian and American stockpiles of long-range strategic missile warheads have grown more than 250 per cent. The missiles have become prodigiously more efficient. In June 1984 the US Defense Department claimed to have fired the first successful interception shot against a ballistic missile. This again tends to undermine deterrence and invites new offensive measures, which become part and parcel of the strategy which envisages that nuclear wars can be fought . . . and won.

What future for armed neutrals in nuclear war?

The arms race is out of control. Stored now are nuclear weapons with a death potential of more than one million Hiroshima bombs. This makes the one side must strive to catch up with the other. Competition is meaningless in an overkill situation of astronomical dimensions. America’s charge, that the USSR is ahead in missile stocks, makes no sense, since most American missiles, carried by submarines, are less vulnerable than Russia’s mainly land-based ones. What matters is not numbers but killing power. Already in mid-1980 Australia’s Office of National Assessment estimated that the chances of nuclear war occurring were five in ten. Today they may be closer to six in ten.

In 1984 the superpowers spend more on their war arsenals than they did in the period leading up to World War II. The wealth squandered is beyond the imagination of ordinary man and woman: far more than enough to wipe out the debts of all the poorer nations combined. Russian expenditure is, pro rata, the world’s highest. On its side the Pentagon, in the next five years, wants to spend SUS 25 thousand million on star-war weapons — rightly so described — alone. Has war ever been prevented in such a situation?

The balance of terror is unstable. When it collapses, by accident or miscalculation, the slaughter in weight, the slaughter will be limitless because it has been delayed until the slaughter weapons have become limitless destructive. The argument that nuclear weapons have preserved peace between the two hostile camps for 38 years, and therefore will continue doing so, is wrong. Before World War II Germany and Russia were at peace for over 40 years — but that did not make peace last. Nor can you negotiate effectively from within the shadow of terror, because the shadow itself becomes deeper and more menacing month by month.

A neutral Australia would still be menaced by fallout from another hemisphere: scientists now speak of a world-wide nuclear winter.* But not being a target, the outlook for our people would be vastly better. Sweden and Switzerland don’t share our defeatist attitude to civil defence. In Switzerland, already some

Some people express concern about possible risks to our security from these facilities [Pine Gap, Nurrungar, and North West Cape]. The Government takes the view that the joint facilities directly contribute to the security that we enjoy every day and that this tangible benefit outweighs the possibility that risks might arise at some future time from outside the facilities . . . Australians cannot claim the full protection of that deterrent without being willing to make some contribution to its effectiveness. It is important to support stability in the strategic relationship between the superpowers and our cooperation in the joint facilities at North West Cape, Pine Gap and Nurrungar does this. As to the specific risk of nuclear attack on these facilities, in the event of nuclear war it is not possible to categorize; we cannot rearm in the worldwide anti-hostile foreign military planners. The Government believes that hosting the facilities does bring with it some degree of added risk of nuclear attack.

— Prime Minister Robert Hawke, speech to Parliament, 6 June 1984.

What of our obligations under ANZUS?

When the ANZUS pact was signed by New Zealand and Australia in 1951 it was to secure the interests of these two small allies in the war against Japan and in the peacemaking to follow. Today Japan, under American pressure, is busily rearming in the world-wide anti-communist network. The ANZUS treaty has been turned inside out. Most military thinkers broadly agree that there is little, if any, practical defence significance for this country left in it. But the more conservative of them hold that the pact remains politically important, and ideologically still more so. Labor in office goes along with this, if only by default.

The treaty does not adequately define the region where it applies. The three member states would consider an armed attack in the Pacific, on any of them, as a danger to all. Each would meet it ‘in accordance with its constitutional processes’. This opens the problem of presidential versus congressional power. It gives the USA some means to evade its obligations, as happened in other, earlier circumstances. Papua New Guinea is no longer covered at all.

Relations between countries are governed not by sentiment, however warm it may be, but by self-interest. America had no alliance with Australia before Darwin or Pearl Harbor were bombed — it had long resisted such a treaty. But when common interest demanded one, a treaty soon followed.

*A nuclear war involving attacks on cities could create enough smoke and soot from burning fires to black out the sun for months or even longer. The consequent fall in temperature would lead to a nuclear winter and to the deaths of hundreds of millions of people, even in noncombatant countries in the southern hemisphere, due to cold and starvation.
If ever America has to choose between friendship with Indonesia (and Japan) or with Australia, there is no certainty that we would come first. Passage from the Pacific into the Indian Ocean goes through the Lombok Straits, which are more easily controlled from Indonesia than from Australia. America stood by Britain during the Falkland crisis? Yes, but not by Argentina, which was its ally too. And when Australia and Holland, two actual allies of the United States, sought American support against Dr Soekarno and Indonesia and hoped it would help them to preserve the status quo in what has since become Irian Jaya, they were disappointed. America, quite rightly for itself, sided with Jakarta.

In 1980 the USA was a party to 141 defence treaties and arrangements with thirteen countries in the West Pacific and S.E. Asia alone. America may well wish to honour its treaties, but it may not always be able to, as the Taiwanese can confirm. And, as so often in the past, Washington may be unable to give Canberra prior warning of important policy changes.

Fortunately ANZUS, like all such treaties, can be terminated. We can withdraw from it. Likewise, we can terminate or renegotiate, at the regular periods when they expire, the agreements under which American bases exist here. Under our constitution any Australian government which has the confidence of Parliament can also, without referenda or constitutional changes, declare Australia neutral, and notify the United Nations accordingly. This would call for no change whatever in our relations with the Commonwealth of Nations or the Crown.

To the question, 'What if the Americans don’t want to do without Australia, or without their bases here?' the answer is that this country’s democratic traditions are still strong enough to let it exercise its legitimate sovereign rights fearlessly. Other countries, like Greece and Spain are, now negotiating for greater independence, without bases, and possibly towards leaving NATO. Holland is beginning to stir on the missile issue. American pressure in western Europe could not stop the natural gas pipeline from the east. To ultra-optimists it should be said that no foreign power would actually fight for installations whose usefulness depends on their undisturbed functioning.

Anyway, they are not irreplaceable. New systems, some of them airborne, could before long supercede several of the present bases. The free survival of the United States and its chosen way of life does not depend on Australia. If it is a sense of guilt which always makes us seek foreign protection – a few million people, most of whom are white in a rich and empty continent, close to populous dark-skinned nations – it is time we adopted more rational means of overcoming it.

When Yugoslavia left the Soviet camp it inspired movements for more freedom throughout eastern Europe. It did not destabilise east-west relations. On the contrary, in the Balkans it improved them. More flexibility leads to less mutual blackmail.

Whether ANZUS without the bases would still be worthwhile to the United States is difficult to know. For Australia it would be a step forward, hence not to be shrugged off, but not a lasting solution. To be allied to the world’s strongest nuclear power, which has its own interests everywhere and may continue to go to the brink for them, would remain insidiously dangerous – and for us strategically pointless.

'Sweden, for example, is an armed neutral, prepared to fight if attacked, but reluctant to participate in the ideological and rhetorical war games that are now such a prominent part of Cold War Two ... This does not mean that Sweden is immune to attack or can be assured of victory in the event of war. No country in the world, including the US and the USSR, is immune to attack and none can be assured of winning a war. There is no “fail-safe” defence policy open to any nation'.

– Dennis Phillips, Cold War Two and Australia, pp. 81-82.

Should we stand by the US for moral reasons?

There are people who oppose neutrality for Australia on principle. Some of them think that what the USSR stands for is so irredeemably evil – much worse than what communist China, our sometime ally, stands for – and America in the last analysis is so morally superior, that we must risk participating in nuclear war to sustain the leader of the West. But if that is their view they would have to answer yes to the proposition that they have a moral right to draw into possible destruction with them all those millions of humans who may prefer life. And since their war would be 'for civilisation’, such people would have to be quite sure that civilisation would survive it. Their conclusion would run counter to the pleas of the best and wisest scientists and church leaders, including the last three popes, who did not and do not believe that faith and order can be saved through using the weapons of chaos.

America and Russia don’t want war. But fear, and the fear-inspired arms race, can drag them, and us, into it. For Australia it is not a question of whether we should share these horrendous risks out of friendship for America, but whether our friend is comparatively so pure that to take the risk, despite everything, makes moral sense. As America’s most reliable ally we must accept at least some responsibility for our ally’s deeds in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras. How much nobler is it, in order to protect western democracy, to slaughter the ‘red’ peasants of Central America, than it is to slaughter, to make socialism safe, the ‘white’ peasants of Afghanistan, or the Somalis? Over the illegal mining of Nicaraguan ports the United States blandly refuses to recognise the authority of the International Court of Justice. The Russians, too, may flout international law. But who dare throw the first stone – or the first N-bomb?

In so much as they would trade with us peaceably and allow us to develop in our own way – a blessing on Russia and America! In so much as their mad rivalry could bitterly hurt unborn generations of Australians – a plague on both their houses! The fundamental issue before us now is not capitalism or communism, nor freedom or enslavement. It is suicide or survival. The greatest immediate challenge before Australia, more urgent than any other, is to get rid of the ANZUS treaty and the nuclear bases which are a noose around our neck. Because armed neutrality is the safest and most direct means to this end, it offers the peace movement a positive new direction. It can lead it away from attitudes, to policies. It could lead the peace movement out of its relative isolation. Armed neutrality is one of those positive and progressive policies which cuts across party lines. It does so in Europe and could do so here.
To fight for a permanently armed and neutral Australia is unconditionally compatible with fighting for the other causes with which large sections of the peace movement identify themselves, for instance with the struggle against the mining, or exporting, of uranium. Armed neutrality, as such, takes up no moral-philosophical or political position on the issue itself. But, certainly, a neutral Australia would be under enormously less pressure to supply the stuff.

Similarly, new methods of defence, based on mass non-co-operation and non-violence, can find their place within this concept of national self-reliance. It is not a question of either-or, but of this as well as that.

Conclusion

Armed neutrality is not Appeasement. Hitlers are bred by wars and their aftermaths. Wars are bred by rigid alliances. In severing the compulsions of war, armed neutrality gives not only peace but liberty a chance.

Australia armed and neutral would be socially and culturally more enterprising. Self-reliance discourages petty truculence and stimulates achievement. Australia would be more at peace with itself (if not without conflicts) and more in harmony with political evolution throughout its region. Neutrality would open the way for new groups and minorities to share in decisions. It would enrich patriotism, for it is a nation-building concept.

Armed neutrality will be won step by step, by political methods, debate and education, but not soon or easily. Convict transportation was not stopped, or federation accomplished, overnight. But the idea of armed neutrality will gain impetus from new emergencies — those great teachers — and from a growing awareness of what the alternatives are. A groundswell is developing, slowly but strongly, which flows in that direction.

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David Martin would like to hear from interested readers and would discuss specific points with them. His address is: PO Box 134, Beechworth, Vic 3747.
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