



MILITARISATION: WATCHING BRIEF

Introduction

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) estimates that in 2010 world military expenditure was \$1630b, a real increase of 1.3% over 2008 and 50% since 2001. This corresponded to 2.6% of the world gross domestic product (GDP) and \$236 for each person in the world. Here are some further statistics from SIPRI:

- The sub-region with greatest growth over the ten year period was Eastern Europe (88%, mainly Russia), followed by North America (80%), North-East Asia (70%), North Africa (69%), and Sub-Saharan Africa (61%), well ahead of Western and Central Europe (4.1%) .
- The USA's military spending accounted for 43% of the world total in 2010, followed by China (7.3%), UK (3.7%), and France and Russia (3.6%).
- The global financial crisis led to a fall in military spending in Europe by 2.8% in 2010.
- In Asia, there was also a slowdown in 2010 in line with a slowing of economic growth.
- The USA has reduced its rate of increase also.

(Ref www.sipri.org).

Trends in Asia and the Pacific

Michael Richardson from the Institute of South East Asian Studies in Singapore wrote on 4 April (in *The Canberra Times*) of the following moves in the region:

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- Singapore has offered basing facilities to US combat ships.
- Vietnam and Malaysia are in the midst of a major military build-up to protect their interests in the South China Sea.
- The Philippines is seeking more military training with US forces and giving the US Navy greater access to its ports.
- Japan is working for the relocation of US forces from Okinawa to Guam.
- South Korea continues to be a major focus of the US military presence.
- The US is realigning its forces in the western Pacific to focus more on maintaining stability in South-East Asia and protecting shipping and energy supply lines.
- China sees this as a regional containment strategy, and continues to have claims over several areas in the region (eg the Spratly islands).

At the same time, there are moves in the region to prevent conflict from escalating. For example, Associated Press reported on 5 April that, at an ASEAN summit meeting, “South East Asian leaders have pledged to step up efforts to resolve maritime disputes with China..... (and) reaffirmed the importance of the 10-year-old declaration on conduct of the parties pledging to promote peace and understanding in the disputed area”.

This is illustrated by commentary on a dispute that has arisen between the Philippines and China over the Scarborough Shoal, which is near Subic Bay. According to John Blaxland from the ANU Strategic and Defence Studies Centre (*The Canberra Times*, 16 April) “with the rehabilitation of Burma, the de-escalation of tensions on the Thai-Cambodia border and the recent meeting of ASEAN in Cambodia, there is talk of ASEAN being of increasing utility for enhancing regional security”.

Australia’s Renewed Role

At a global level Australia has continued to be active in promoting nuclear disarmament. Most recently, at the Seoul Nuclear Security Summit, Australia re-stated its commitment to combat the threat of nuclear terrorism. Three initiatives were presented by the Government – ratification of the Nuclear Terrorism Convention, hosting a regional workshop to enhance collaboration in our region on this, and a review of security arrangements at the nuclear science facility at Lucas Heights by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Australia has also maintained a strong position against the development of nuclear weapons by North Korea, and their potential development by Iran. This approach has included adopting UN-imposed sanctions against each country.

The US is seeking to re-orient its military posture to favour the Asia-Pacific region, partly to secure emerging trade routes, and partly to send a message to China not to assume it can dominate the region. Apart from its increasing economic, educational and political links within the Asia-Pacific region, Australia has moved to embrace the greater US military presence. The Prime Minister, Julia Gillard MP, at a press conference in Seoul, Korea, on 27 March 2012, made it clear that “the alliance we have with the US is pivotal to our security.....we took the next natural step in the evolution of that alliance last year when I agreed with President Obama that we would host marines on a rotational basis in the Northern Territory for exercising”. She said any other use of Australian territory (eg Cocos Islands, Stirling Naval Base) would be the subject of further talks. The first group of US troops began a six-month assignment in Darwin on 4 April 2012.

At a speech in Virginia USA on 29 March 2012, Australia’s Ambassador to the US, Kim Beazley, praised the Obama administration for preparing for future conflicts with a new Asia strategy. He welcomed the move, saying that Australia had long advocated a US strategic swing towards Asia. In an area where there are disputes on land and sea, he saw the US presence as positive.

The Vice-Commander of the US Pacific Air Force, Lieutenant-General Paul Selva, spoke at a seminar in Canberra on 13 April organised by the Sir Richard Williams Foundation. He welcomed Australia’s greater commitment to supporting the US role in Asia/Pacific, saying that “the military balance in the western Pacific and south-east Asia was increasingly unstable, and military interoperability between US and Australian forces was important”.

Caution has been expressed in several quarters about these trends in Australia’s role. For example, Hugh White of the ANU Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, wrote in *The Age* (29 March) saw worrying signs in these developments: “It amounts to the biggest expansion of American interest in military access to Australia since World War II. For decades, Australia has been unique among America’s close allies because we did not host US military basis. And that was only because the US did not want them”. What has changed, he said, is China. Thus the strategic change “is about building America’s military position in Asia to resist China’s growing challenge to American primacy in Asia”. Further, “the US proposals are... about dragging Australia into America’s escalating rivalry with its biggest trading partner”.

Alan Dupont from the University of NSW said on 30 March that Australia’s move “risks unsettling Australia’s neighbours by being seen as too accommodating of American requests for military expansion in the region”. He doubted the approach had been thought through fully by the government, and wondered what limits would apply to US access.

Bruce Haigh, a former Australian diplomat, highlighted the reaction of Indonesia towards Australia’s moves (*The Canberra Times*, 5 April). “Putting a brigade of deployable, combat-ready marines and US naval vessels into Darwin, based B52s at Tindal, home porting US submarines at HMAS Stirling in WA and flying US unmanned spy aircraft out of Cocos Islands have combined to cause concern”.

James Wolfensohn, the Australian former head of the World Bank, addressed the Asia Society on 21 March. He urged Australians to welcome the opportunities presented by the rise of China, and to avoid policies directed at simply containing it. He warned against developing military ties with the US at the expense of a relationship with China, which has no interest in military confrontation.

Quaker Concerns

The Quaker Peace and Legislation Committee (QPLC) made a formal submission to the Consultation held prior to release of the Defence White Paper in 2009. In that submission, QPLC made clear the longstanding Quaker opposition to war and preparation for war, and stressed the importance of preparing for peace. In relation to the current realities of Australia's place in the world, it argued that training for and participation in Peace Support Operations should become a core function of the ADF, as that is what it has been doing in our region, for example in East Timor and the Solomons.

The submission stressed the value of Australia working with other countries to build peace, and advocated cheap, low technology equipment be used by well-trained soldiers alongside civilian workers. This would increase the chance of supporting the institutions of stability and reducing the chance of violence. QPLC pushed for the greater use of civilians to prevent and resolve conflict through nonviolent means, and for Australia to set an example in this regard.

The recent moves in the Asia-Pacific region appear to show a continued reliance by Australia on being led by the US in strategic thinking, with priority given to military options. Quakers put this in perspective in our submission in February 2012 to the Government's Task Force dealing with 'Australia and the Asian Century' project. That submission highlighted the relationship between environmental challenges and building the conditions for peace in the region. It proposed greater engagement between Australia and Asia by means of increased aid, people-to-people contacts, dialogue, and working for ecologically-responsible policies.

Nationally Quakers involved in the YM Earthcare and Peace Committees are working on a blueprint for a peaceful and sustainable Australia. This is consistent with the QPLC focus on *Preparing for Peace*. Robert Howell, who is working for the committees, will be visiting Regional Meetings to seek ideas and responses as this project proceeds during the year.

Friends may wish to take up with MPs and Senators their concern about the trends in militarisation in our region, and to seek ways of building greater support for nonviolent options. In doing this, Friends may prefer to work with other NGOs in raising public awareness.

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