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Submission: Time to Investigate Nonviolence

A Submission to the 2008 Defence White Paper Review by James Tonson

I attended the consultation evening held at the Melbourne Town Hall but did not address the committee as I had not prepared my thoughts adequately.

I have trained in and tried to live my life in accordance with the practice of non-violence, as developed by Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Gene Sharp and many others. I have come to believe that it is the only way of ensuring our security not because of any religious conviction or mandate from 'God', but because as a pragmatist I have concluded that long term peace and security cannot be achieved by approaches that apply power in a coercive manner to enforce the will of one party over another. Instead we need to apply our power in a way that empowers others and meets their needs as well as ours.

I believe this notion is supported by the rise in terrorist activity. No matter how much power we can bring to bear down on individuals, groups, nations, religions and even states, no matter how hard we can coerce, no matter how sophisticated our technology we can never guarantee peace using power-over approaches because they always leave someone seeking revenge. As we come to terms with the effects of globalisation we must learn that our security is dependant on that of others. We must find ways of building security together, not separately.

This was also the lesson of the nuclear age, where two sides achieved the ability to wipe each other out and thus the security of each side became dependant on the security of the other. Now as nuclear technologies become more accessible we must adapt our definition of 'others' to mean more than just a few powerful states.

The nature of our defence force operations are changing and peace building is becoming a larger and larger part of its function. There is an irony here that an organisation that an organisation resourced and structured to fight wars is now being given the task of doing the exact opposite - building peace. Our security situation is now radically different. The chances of Australia being invaded are close to zero. To respond to these changing situation we need a radical shift in the nature of our defence forces. While we might keep a gradually smaller and smaller force with a mandate to use power-over approaches that apply military force for 'defence' I believe the time is past when we can ignore the need for other methods of building peace and security. I say other because I believe that violent and non-violent means are fundamentally different. Non-violent means will not be effective if they are used in conjunction with violent force or after 'peace' has been established at the barrel of a gun. The real application of a non-violent approach to peace-building will require completely separate units, with different mandates, skills and training

I do not expect the Australian Government to simply accept the assertions and beliefs laid out here. But I do believe that there is enough

- public mandate as expressed to the committee
- need for alternative security building measures and
- existing practice of non-violent methods by NGOs in serious conflict situations

that the Australian Government can no longer ignore that a non-violent force may have something to contribute to our peace building forces. As such I would like to support the following recommendation put by Mr David Johnson in his submission to the review:

The government establish a committee to report on the mission, rules of engagement, structure and budget for an Australian Nonviolent Force. The committee might include:

- a senior Australian military or police officer with experience in peace-keeping,
- an Australian aid official or consultant with comprehensive experience in

managing community-oriented operations in areas of conflict,

- an expert from an international authority such as the International Centre for Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC), and/or the Nonviolent Peaceforce, and/or EAPPI
- a representative of PBI who has been involved in nonviolent interventions in dangerous situations,
- an experienced trainer in nonviolence.

Within this investigation I believe consideration should be given to whether a non-violent force could work effectively from within an organisation such as the ADF whose primary methods are violent or whether it should be established as an independent force.

In the longer term I believe we should look to replace our "Defence Force" with a "Peace Force" but at least let's begin by investigating the options available to us.

I agree to my submission being published on the Defence website

I agree to my submission being quoted in the Community Consultation Report