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Defence White Paper Submission

What role should our armed forces play?

This question whilst seemingly open holds the assumption that we should have armed forces – that in fact we need to be armed to maintain security. This assumption is flawed and perpetuates the necessity for increased armament and military growth. What we lack in our society is institutional support for people who have the skills and training to defuse conflict using non-military means. At an international level this is particularly evident, especially in light of the role that Australian forces played in the illegal invasion of Iraq. Diplomacy is much more difficult and requires much more persistence and skill to achieve than does building an army and recruiting soldiers capable of shooting weapons.

On a domestic front community processes that facilitate equality, social cohesion, recognition of existing disadvantage and solutions to this, and responsible environmental stewardship are needed in order to avoid situations that give rise to violence.

So in answer to the question, ‘What role should our armed forces play?’ I argue that they actually have a very limited role in their current form.

When I was 17 I attended a community health training session about bullying and sexual assault. The first thing we covered was the cycle of violence. Violence perpetuates violence. The same applies to the military. We cannot expect to solve a conflict at the butt of a gun...this only brings retaliation and the continuance of the thing we are trying to stop. You cannot invade a country with bombs and missiles and expect the people being bombed to react any differently.

What kinds of armed forces we should develop?

Firstly, they need not be armed, as elaborated on above.

The planet is facing an uncertain future in the wake of climate change. The challenges humans face if we are to re-establish a safe climate are immense. Water level rises are expected around the globe, droughts in Australia will become a regular feature of our seasons, food and water will be in short supply, conflict over resources in the current climate are likely to escalate and many of the species – both flora and fauna – that currently roam land, sea and sky are set to become extinct. In parts of the Pacific islands once inhabitable are becoming submerged leading to climate refugees.

Our 'armed forces', no longer armed, and which tend to recruit those who like adventure, should be thus transformed into a roving climate skilled taskforce that helps construct levies where they are needed, relocate refugees, grow food and establish safe water access and sewerage in places affected by natural disasters. This climate skilled taskforce would be trained in practical skills that help people and other species in times of crisis. This taskforce would also have a preventative role through providing the labour to establish mass renewable energy farms and other such things that if we are to survive climate change are desperately needed.

Can we afford such forces?

We cannot afford to continue living the way we are living. Our military currently wastes money, burns too many fossil fuels and trains people in a way that perpetuates violence.

We cannot afford not to transform the military into something like described above. Humans will not survive past a couple of generations hence if we do not radically act. In the 1940's the nuclear bomb provided a warning to humanity about their actions... we did not listen and now it is something much larger that is threatening us with extinction.

We do not need an armed force – we need a skilled force that represents the needs of the community both domestically and internationally. Our needs right now are to prepare for climate disaster and where possible prevent these disasters from occurring. Why are our forces not out developing renewable technologies and constructing them on mass scale, helping to redistribute farms so that food will be accessible once the availability of oil ends?

Again, we cannot afford not to have a force that has as its primary goal achieving these tasks.