

Marrickville Peace Group

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Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds
Minister for Defence
Parliament House
Canberra

Dear Senator Reynolds

MPG has corresponded with yourself and your predecessors on topics relating to peace, over many years.

Normally it would be absolutely unnecessary to ponder the question of whether peace is preferable to war, the answer being so obvious. Of course, peace is preferable!

However, that question has been brought to mind recently, in connection with certain decisions and announcements made by the Australian government.

On March 23, 2020, the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, called for an immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world, so that countries could work together in a unified effort to combat the virus. Guterres said: "End the sickness of war and fight the disease that is ravaging our world. It starts by stopping the fighting everywhere. Now. That is what our human family needs, now more than ever."

Australia played a significant role in drawing up the UN Charter of 1945. Peace-loving people hoped that Australia would honour the role it played at the inception of the UN, by supporting the Secretary General's March appeal.

The present government, so far from responding positively, announced, on July 1, 2020, a \$270billion increase in defence spending, including the acquisition of long-range missiles. The rationale provided in support of this announcement was the perception of increased instability in our region. There is a grave, inherent contradiction in this line of argument. Increased spending and the acquisition of high-tech weapons will increase the very regional tensions given as the reason for the spending. They will make the prospects for peace recede and bring the possibility of war closer.

A far better course would have been a positive response to the SG's appeal and the indefinite postponement of all such announcements. Once again, Australia missed an opportunity to be a world leader in the cause of peace.

Meanwhile, despite advice about the risk of spreading Covid-19 infection, Australia is again playing host to US marines in Darwin. You had the wisdom to postpone their deployment for a while, but they are here now – and, with news of a US marine being infected, the very risk you were warned about months ago has become a reality. News of an outbreak amongst US

marines in Okinawa only makes the situation even more concerning, Okinawa being, we understand, a staging-point for marines *en route* to Darwin. Even leaving the pandemic aside, the presence of US marines in Darwin raises, rather than lowers, regional tensions.

What is more, the RAN is understood to have already left port to join the RIMPAC exercises, which will take place around the Hawaiian Islands in August. Ships are notorious incubators of Covid-19. Up to 25 countries are involved in RIMPAC and the exercises are likely to become a vehicle for further spread of the disease. Why is it considered so essential to take part in these exercises, which are really preparations for waging war, when the risk of spreading infection is so abundantly clear?

Each of these instances suggest that the government is more interested in preparing for war than it is in maintaining or seeking peace; more interested in military prowess than the wellbeing of the global community; more intent on flexing military muscle than engaging in diplomacy.

Does the government now attach greater significance to preparations for war than it does to seeking peaceful co-existence?

That is the question we would like you to answer, for this is the way things now appear. Australia is on course for a major confrontation with China. The further we go down this path, the harder it will be to stay at peace. The belief that peace is always preferable to war used to be considered a universally shared value. Regrettably, we can no longer take that for granted.

Yours sincerely

Nick Deane
On behalf of Marrickville Peace Group.