Submission to the ANU's investigation "Securing our future: Australian attitudes to national security.

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Security Challenges, now and in the future.

At present and for the time being, there are no, significant, national security challenges for Australia. In the future, there may be many. Feeling secure in the present should not make us complacent about the future.

The military perspective

For many Australians the idea of 'national security' is closely related to military considerations. For example, we are accustomed to certain matters being kept secret on national security grounds, which usually means for some reason of national, military strategy. We frequently hear that we live in 'uncertain times' – especially in connection with the rise to prominence of China, on the global scene. Indeed, national security means military protection to many in the Australian community. Whenever a threat to national security is mentioned, the assumption often made is that the threat is of a military nature.

In this connection, many Australians have a fear of invasion or, at least, fear of abandonment. (In passing, this may lie behind popular opposition to migration). Such fear may have its roots in the early days of the colony, when the British had a somewhat precarious foothold on Australia and various enemies of Britain might have competed for dominance of the continent. It may also relate back to the WW2 situation, when many anticipated an actual invasion by Japanese forces – although there never was any actual threat. This residual fear may be the reason that there is such a focus on military defence within the national 'psyche' (if one can call it that), when it comes to discussion of national security.

The consequence of this is that successive governments have been somewhat obsessed with strengthening security through military means. It has resulted in a reliance on the protection of a nation of greater military power (previously the UK and now the USA) and a great emphasis on the importance of military prowess – as seen in the ANZAC legend and reflected in expenditure on the acquisition of military assets.

Those who think along such lines, military planners in particular, overlook the highly significant facts of Australia's geography. Invading Australia would, logistically, be an enormously expensive undertaking because of the long supply lines (over water) that would be required for any would-be assailant, whatever their country of origin. As an island continent with no land borders with any other country; with its abundant resources (which would *in extremis* be at the disposal of a single government), Australia is, inherently, an extremely safe place. Our geography should be a key consideration in any debate about security, especially military security.

A glaring example of this, misplaced and narrow-minded emphasis on military might is provided by the AUKUS agreement. In fact, AUKUS is more about attack than defence. The Defence Minister, Richard Marles, is fond of reminding us of the need for Australia to 'project

power' in order to preserve security. This is somewhat absurd, given that there is no military threat to Australia, nor one likely to emerge in the foreseeable future.

In his book "The Big Fix" Dr Albert Palazzo proposes a policy of strategic defence as the best military stance for Australia, given its geography and the current state of military technology. In "The Echidna Strategy" Sam Roggeveen of the Lowy Institute argues that Australia is not threatened by China's rise and that a fresh approach, based on the ability to keep the nation safe, is required.

Whilst a military attack on Australia certainly would threaten security, it is not in the least bit likely and can be adequately defended against. There are real, foreseeable threats to national security – but they are not of a military nature and not immediately threatening.

What does real 'security' entail?

Security can be viewed objectively. People are secure if they have all the basic necessities of life; - a safe place to live ('a roof over one's head'); a sufficient and reliable source of water, food, fuel and clothing etc.. Added to these might be access to education for the young generation; access to employment, transport, health-care etc.. On top of these we might add protection – protection from those who might commit crimes (such as robbery) against citizens.
However, beyond objective security it is necessary to move into a more subjective realm, in that 'security' becomes entangled with a person's subjective feelings. To be 'secure' a person must internalise security as a sensation. He or she must sense that s/he is protected by the social system of which s/he is a part. S/he must feel free from any thing or event that might damage that sense. What is required is a general sense of security, as well as complete confidence in all its objective aspects.

Certainly, being free from being attacked by any party, domestic or international, is one component of this.

The secure citizen must also feel confident that 'the government' or 'the authorities' have policies in place that will facilitate whatever is necessary to minimise threats and deal with all eventualities. The secure citizen should feel confident that, if or when disaster does strike, adequate relief and support will be available; that 'help' will arrive.

Real threats

Having argued that national security is not limited to military security and that Australia is militarily quite secure, are there any real threats to national security?

Julian Cribb has identified 10 major factors that, in his view, are bringing about the collapse of civilisation on a global scale. Such a collapse would, most certainly, impact national security. The factors Cribb identifies are:-

- Resource scarcity, especially of fresh water, soil, forests, fish and certain minerals
- Decline of the Earth's life support systems
- Nuclear war
- Hothouse Earth
- Food insecurity

- Global poisoning
- Overpopulation
- Pandemic disease
- Uncontrolled technologies
- Misinformation and delusion

Cribb is arguing on a global scale, but his points have relevance for Australia, on a national scale, albeit at some time in the future. All the factors Cribb mentions relate to the prevalence of an ideology of perpetual, economic growth on this our planet of finite resources.

Many of Cribb's points can be grouped together under the heading 'climate change'. The science of climate change, or global and ocean warming, is well established. It must be acknowledged as a highly significant, if not immediate, threat to national security. The government's own National Climate Risk Assessment (NCRA) report does just this. It identifies many of the events that the nation is likely to experience. These are identified with varying degrees of confidence. However, each and every risk will have an impact on security; both on the actual (objective) security of the systems that support us and on the subjective **sense** of security that individuals might feel.

Whilst comprehensive, the government's report is limited in one significant way. It identifies the objective and direct risks that Australia faces (more frequent and more intense weather events, floods, fires etc.), but these are but one part of the matter. It looks at Australia in isolation from the rest of the world. As well as impacting Australia, the factors the report takes into account are also bound to impact every other nation on Earth, one way or another. The NCRA fails to consider the international ramifications of the impending crisis. What these might be cannot be predicted with any accuracy.

The other, and possibly more immediate and significant, aspects are political events elsewhere on the planet. Despite the fact that the reality of climate change is well understood within the scientific community, there is little happening on the international, political scene to make the necessary, drastic changes that are necessary to slow or stop the anthropogenic contribution to the coming crisis, nor to making provision to weather or deal with the upheavals that may be coming. Rather than co-operating in the face of coming shortages, nations appear to be continuing to behave in traditional, competitive ways, consistent with the prevalent notion of continual economic growth. As the crisis deepens, this could well lead to international, political instability. Wars, massive human migrations and even general chaos seem quite possible.

Immigration – a threat?

There is little doubt that Australia is an attractive destination for displaced persons. In view of the likelihood of the climate crisis bringing a level of chaos to world affairs, Australia could well become the recipient of totally unprecedented numbers of migrants seeking refuge. (This realisation may be in the 'back of the mind' of those who fear and oppose immigration.) The point I wish to make is that 'stopping the boats' on a massive scale is neither a sensible nor practical response. Treating immigration as a threat to national security is to ignore the global conditions that the planet and its human population may be facing. Indeed, national security might be better served by preparing to include and embrace far larger number than presently enter the country. From a humane security perspective, it may be better to plan to accommodate large numbers of climate refugees than try to exclude them.

Concluding remarks.

Whilst the current situation seems quite secure, there are serious threats to national security on the horizon. (The least of these is the threat of military invasion.) The real threats relate to the local and global impacts of the coming climate crisis. Current government policy seems to be focused on supposed military threats. This even makes involvement in conflict more likely than it need be, so contributes to national insecurity. (This is policy, which might even be intended to keep the populace in a constant state of unnecessary and unrealistic fear.) On the other hand, the real threats associated with the climate crisis are a legitimate cause for concern. However, a fearful response is not appropriate.

Any policy approach that generates fear in the community, in itself, poses a threat - by upsetting the subjective sense of national security. What are needed are policies that face the future with a clear understanding of possible events and confidence in the nation's capacity to meet even the worst-case scenarios. The public needs a sense that 'we' can cope with whatever impacts or upheavals may come our way, without domestic strife and without resort to military violence.

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