

SUBMISSION TO THE AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENT'S JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
DEFENCE & TRADE

INQUIRY- INTERNATIONAL ARMED CONFLICT DECISION MAKING

31 October 2022

Dear Committee,

The decision by any society to go to war is the most momentous decision a Government can make. It is not a game but involves death and destruction being visited on "the enemy" at enormous cost in Australian blood and treasure let alone the potential for similar retribution to be inflicted on us all.

It was not that long ago that the moral danger posed by the idea that two consenting adults should be able to be married required a plebiscite of the entire enfranchised population in order for our parliamentary representatives to adequately discharge their commission. That question of course pales into insignificance compared to the moral, ethical and national security dangers in willingly engaging in war. One would be tempted to suggest that such a decision should also be subject to the same sort of participative democratic decision making.

If however, we are to continue to support a representative democracy then it would appear that the appropriate forum to make the momentous decision to enter a discretionary war should be the Parliament authorising such an adventure after deliberate debate on how our national interest would be served. Similarly for any proposal to enter into a security guarantee or treaty with another country that would require our entry into a war. The fact such a war was being entered into for political or economic reasons should negate any concerns about pre-notification of ADF deployment as such deployments are always proceeded in most democracies by a campaign to convince the electorate of the inherent good vs evil of our position or the imperative to intervene in someone else's war and that is easily reported in advance by foreign intelligence operatives.

Australia has a rich history of engaging in doomed and at times illegal military adventures and with the exception of WW2 thus far have been lucky enough not to have suffered retaliatory strikes on the continent or population at large. Clearly the capacity for a Prime Minister to unilaterally commit the nation to war has not served us well. A Prime Minister has no electoral mandate to commit the country to war. Parliamentary review and authorisation by both Houses of a proposal to willingly enter a war should at the least make for a more considered assessment of the estimated costs and risks involved, instead of the blank cheque approach currently used.

Such an arrangement doesn't have to be a zero sum game as the defence industry hawks claim, the executive should of course continue to be free to respond immediately if Australia is in imminent danger or actually attacked. Disaster assistance and peacekeeping could also continue at the invitation of the recipient countries.

Lastly, it is well known that wars are fought by the young and the poor on behalf of the old and the rich and the most voracious supporters of war are the cheerleaders and war profiteers back at the home front. This would appear to be unlikely to change particularly while we have arms manufacturers with established lobbying operations in place in Australia. Eisenhower's warning to guard against the unwarranted influence of the military-industrial complex remains prescient. Perhaps as a means of ensuring Parliament's suitably sober assessment of the national interest in engaging in a discretionary war we could introduce conscription for active duty front line service for a close member of the family of each Parliamentarian that votes in support of war?

Regards

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