8 Social Defence for Australia?

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'What level of military commitment is needed to defend Australia against external aggression?'

Much discussion in Australia about the praticalities of defence is encompassed by this question. Many people see military preparations as essential to deter aggression, and in doing this prefer to err on the side of caution, namely by providing too much rather than too little military defence. This would be the view of most people in the Department of Defence, and quite reasonably so, since few of them would rather fight a war than prepare for one that didn't occur. From their point of view, there is no alternative to military preparedness if aggression is to be deterred or defeated.

Others think military spending is too high. They are concerned about the enormous destruction that can be caused by modern weapons, especially nuclear weapons. And they see spending on weapons as occurring at the expense of spending on human needs such as food, clothing and shelter.

Many people who identify with the 'peace movement' fall into this category. But often they are not so concerned with the defence of Australia as with the threat of nuclear war. The Australian Government has no nuclear weapons under its own control, and there seems to be little support for obtaining them. So concern about nuclear war is directed mainly at the nuclear weapons states, especially the United States and the Soviet Union.

The main link which Australia has with preparations for nuclear war comes through US military facilities on Australian territory, in particular the strategic bases at Nurrungar, Pine Gap and North West Cape, the Darwin RAAF base for US B-52s and ports for US nuclear weapon carrying ships, especially Cockburn Sound. Most of those in the Australian peace movement would like to see these facilities removed from Australia, and for the Australian Government to adopt a neutral, non-aligned foreign policy. For them, this goal is a high priority, and the issue of what should be the level and type of conventional military defence to defend Australia is of secondary importance.

These differences between a typical military perspective and a typical peace movement perspective are not surprising. What is surprising is the degree of consensus between these two perspectives on the assumptions underlying the question at the top of this article. Let me examine some of these assumptions.

(i)   *Military versus Non-military*
One key assumption behind the question is that defence must be military defence. One reason the peace movement makes so little headway in convincing people of the value of disarmament is that it offers no alternative for defence against aggression.

One possible non-military alternative is social defence, also called civilian defence, non-violent defence and non-military defence. Here only a few brief comments will be made about social defence, considering the available literature on the subject.[1]

Social defence is non-violent community resistance to aggression as an alternative to military defence. It uses methods such as refusals to obey, strikes, boycotts, demonstrations and setting up alternative government. Social defence has been used, in a largely spontaneous fashion, in the resistance to the Nazis in occupied Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands,

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and in the resistance of the Czechoslovak people to the 1968 Soviet invasion, among other examples.

Social defence is based on the principle that no regime, no matter how ruthless, can survive without a large degree of support or acquiescence from the population. Social defence is premised on gaining widespread participation in removing this support and acquiescence.

Social defence is not an instant alternative. To be fully effective, advance planning, preparation and practice are essential. Instead of disarmament, which is the standard appeal of the peace movement, the aim would be transarmament: a gradual switch from military defence and deterrence to social defence and deterrence.

A related assumption in the question is contained in the phrase 'what *level* of military commitment?'. There are also different *types* of military commitment possible. The most well known alternative to conventional military forces is guerilla warfare. Social defence can be understood as the non-violent analogue of guerilla warfare.[2]

(ii) *Defence versus Offence*
The question assumes that military forces are used for defence. Yet a large fraction of modern military technologies, such as ships, aircraft and missiles, can be used as effectively for offence as for defence. This of course is one of the driving forces behind military races, since the defensive preparations of one's potential enemy must be considered as potentially offensive, and appropriate measures taken. This problem is glaringly obvious in the case of the nuclear arms race. But it also applies to conventional arms as in Australia, where more purely defensive preparations such as civil defence or psychological defence are tiny components of the military budget.

Social defence by its nature does not give rise to any threat of violence towards an enemy, and so avoids the problem that 'defence' may also potentially be used for offence.

(iii) *External versus Internal*
The question assumes the aggression originates from an external 'enemy'. Yet when threats to human life and liberty around the world are considered—in places such as Argentina, Kampuchea, Poland and Uganda—it is often found to be the case that internal repression, sometimes to the extent of genocide, is more serious than any external danger. In many cases military establishments are responsible for initiating or carrying out internal repression. So military races are not only responsible for war, but by increasing the means of violence and experience in using violence, both concentrated in the hands of a small professional group, military races also contribute towards internal repression and loss of freedoms.[3]

In Australia the possibility that military forces would be used for severe internal repression is much smaller than for most other countries. But the chance of this occurring could increase if social polarisation and political conflict were to increase, as occurred during a long-term economic decline in Uruguay, leading that country from a healthy democracy to a ruthless dictatorship.[4]

Social defence, because it is non-violent and because it relies on mass participation, does not contain the seeds of internal repression. But more than this, social defence provides the means to resist repression. The same non-violent techniques that are used to resist external aggression are entirely suitable for resisting a political or military coup or the slow development of a repressive political climate. Indeed, two of the most noteworthy successes of social defence—though both were achieved without any prior planning or preparation—were the collapse of the Kapp Putsch in Germany in 1920, and the failure of the Algerian Generals' Revolt to achieve any success in

France in 1961. In each case a military takeover was frustrated by non-violent resistance, such as general strikes and refusals to obey orders.[5]

(iv) *Territorial State versus Community*

The question assumes that the entity to be defended is 'Australia'. It is also usually assumed that aggressors are other territorial states such as the Soviet Union or Japan. The 'enemy' is usually conceived of as the entire population of the aggressor country.

Social defence can be a form of national defence, and indeed most of the literature on the subject assumes this. Yet by the nature of its methods, social defence is most naturally a defence of community, of the social fabric. Its methods can be used equally by separatist movements or racial minorities against military attack or political repression.

But in relation to an aggressor country, the important feature of the social defence perspective is its emphasis on seeing the 'enemy' as potentially non-unified and hence changeable. If the armed forces of a country invaded Australia, social defence would not only involve non-violent resistance. It would also involve attempts to communicate with and sow seeds of doubt in the minds of soldiers, and to communicate with and mobilise support from sectors of the population of the aggressor country.

This approach is not all that different from the conventional defence posture. In case of invasion, every form of political, economic and social pressure would be mobilised against the aggressor country, such as through international bodies and trading partners. Social defence would use these methods but also go beyond them to generate political and social opposition to the aggression within the aggressor country, and within the military of the aggressor. In the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, Czechoslovak people talked to Soviet soldiers and in other ways communicated their views and opposition, and as a result the soldiers had to be rotated quickly. If the Czechoslovaks had been able to communicate with the Soviet people, this would have been very threatening to the Soviet government and would have endangered their military operation.

Conventional defence usually conceives of the enemy country as a unified whole. Relatively little effort is devoted to generating dissent within the population of the enemy country. In contrast, social defence sees the population of any aggressor country as one of the weakest parts of the attacker's force. As well as mobilising *inter*national pressures against aggression, *sub*national opposition is also encouraged.

One of the main reasons why the social defence posture is likely to be more effective in weakening the internal unity of an aggressor country is precisely that the methods used in resistance are non-violent. It is much more difficult for an aggressor government to convince its population of the righteousness of its attack if the resistance is entirely non-violent and no threat of counter attack exists, than if violent resistance is adopted. Any policy of transarmament to social defence would therefore involve fostering links with and spreading ideas to many groups in potential aggressor countries.

Social Defence for Australia

Social defence is a new idea, first presented in organised form in 1958. The concepts have been slowly spreading in small academic circles and in some part of some peace movements. In Australia probably only a handful of people had seriously thought about social defence until a couple of years ago, whereas in some European countries considerable attention has been given to the idea. Yet there are several reasons why moves towards transarmament and to social defence would be especially appropriate for Australia.

First, an invasion of Australia is very unlikely in the next few decades, as is the chance of a military coup or severely repressive government. This might be thought

to reduce the necessity for considering social defence, but this fails to recognise the importance of making use of the freedom to experiment that lack of serious threats permits. Second, Australian society is by world standards relatively cohesive and free of political repression. Both these characteristics make it much easier to motivate, organise and sustain a social defence programme. Third, Australian moves towards social defence would provide an inspiring example to many people around the world.

There are a number of specific problems peculiar to Australia that would need to be addressed in any transarmament programme, such as the large sparsely populated areas in the north (which are difficult to defend militarily as well). But rather than address these in any detail, which anyway has already been done in part by Andrew Mack,[4] it may be just as illuminating to analyse how social defence might cope with a specific threat. For this purpose I will discuss an invasion by Indonesia, though the chance of this occurring in the next couple of decades must be rated as small.

To plan and prepare and implement social defence against such an invasion, it is first important to determine the rationale for the invasion. If the aim were to utilise Australian industrial capacity for Indonesian purposes, the obvious response is for workers to be able and ready to shut down factories so that they cannot be used. Johan Galtung suggests ingeniously that factories include vital components which, if removed or destroyed, could not be readily replaced. Copies could be held in safe places, perhaps even overseas, so that even torture would be of no use to aggressors trying to get the factories going.

A more difficult threat to counter would be Indonesian occupation of areas in the far north in order to extract minerals or otherwise exploit natural resources. Because the local communities threatened would mostly be small and isolated, social defence would be relatively ineffectual. (By the same token, so long as the overwhelming bulk of the Australian people were not directly affected, the threat to the social fabric could not be considered as serious either.) To repulse or deter such an invasion non-violently would almost certainly require transnational action. Besides the generation of international protests and economic pressures, a major effort could be made to communicate the Australian viewpoint to Indonesian soldiers and to the Indonesian people, by leaflets, radio broadcasts and personal contact.

It is important to remember that Indonesia is governed by a very repressive and indeed brutal regime. Half a million to a million people were slaughtered in 1965-1966 when the present regime took power—another indication of the danger of military forces to their own people. Yet because of its own repressive nature, the Indonesian regime is vulnerable to opposition from its own people. Whereas for present-day Australia it is virtually inconceivable that popular unrest could lead to toppling of the government outside parliamentary channels, such a possibility is much more believable for Indonesia. Non-violent deterrence would proceed by making efforts to strengthen those elements in Indonesian society which oppose aggression and repression.

Such a policy is clearly quite contrary to that adopted by the Australian Government. The 1965-1966 massacres were virtually unremarked in Australia and the West generally. It was an example of what Naom Chomsky and Edward Herman term 'constructive terror' in that certain vested interests in the West were served by the bloodbath.[6] When Indonesia invaded East Timor in 1975, the Australian Government did its utmost to avoid taking action. Yet it is fairly clear that without the tacit agreement of the United States and Australia, the Indonesian devastation of East Timor would probably not have been initiated, much less carried to the murderous extent it has since been taken.

So here is a case in which the political policies of the Australian Government, by tacitly supporting the Indonesian military's attacks against its own and neighbouring peoples, have probably increased the potential military threat to

Australia. In the government's eyes, of course, this threat provides a justification for military defence.

Social defence should not be seen as simply a domestic affair. To become a comprehensive alternative, it must involve a global concern for social justice: support for those groups resisting aggression and repression, with special encouragement for non-violent resistance. Transarmament should not be seen as something that happens on an isolated national scale, but as a process involving mutually supported initiatives in many parts of the world.

Leading the Way to Social Defence

In a few countries with open-minded governments and militaries, some consideration and support for social defence may be forthcoming. For example, a few governments in Europe have expressed interest in social defence. But convincing the decision-makers of the superiority of social defence, while worth trying, is not the way to achieve success in every country. Under repressive regimes, such as Chile or the Soviet Union, transarmament would not be seriously considered because its adoption would place the regime at risk.

By its nature as a defence involving participation from large fractions of the population, the logical way to move towards social defence is through community initiatives. These could involve distribution of information, formulation of plans, advance preparations, and training for non-violent resistance. There are two other advantages of moves towards social defence through community initiatives. First, community initiatives for social defence will help avoid the professionalisation of social defence. Since social defence is participatory defence, planning for it from the top of bureaucracies is unlikely to offer full effectiveness. Second, people who are prepared for social defence are also better equipped to be involved in social action movements, such as the feminist and workers' control movements. To the extent that such movements achieve their goal of empowering people to take control of their own lives, society will become and seem more worth defending. This can only increase the potential effectiveness of social defence.

NOTES

1. Stephen King-Hall, *Defence in the Nuclear Age*. Victor Gollancz, London, 1958; Theodore Olson and Gordon Christiansen, *Thirty-one Hours*, Canadian Friends Service Committee, Toronto, 1966; Adam Roberts (ed.), *The Strategy of Civilian Defence: Non-violent Resistance to Aggression*, Faber and Faber, London, 1967; American Friends Service Committee, *In Place of War*, Grossman, New York, 1967; Anders Boserup and Andrew Mack, *War Without Weapons: Non-violence in National Defence*, Frances Pinter, London, 1974; Johan Galtung, *Peace, War and Defense, Essays in Peace Research, Volume Two*, Christian Ejlers, Copenhagen, 1976; Gustaaf Geeraerts (ed.), *Possibilities of Civilian Defence in Western Europe*, Swets and Zeitlinger, Amsterdam, 1977; *Bulletin of Peace Proposals*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 1978; Gene Sharp, *Social Power and Political Freedom*, Porter Sargent, Boston, 1980; Gene Keyes, 'Strategic Non-violent Defense: The Construct of an Option', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2, June 1981, pp. 125-151.

2. Boserup and Mack, ibid.

3. Michael Randle, *Militarism and Repression*, International Seminars on Training for Non-violent Action, South Boston, 1980.

4. Andrew Mack, 'The Strategy of Non-military Defence', in Desmond ball (ed.), *Strategy and Defence: Australian Essays*, George Allen and Unwin, Australia, 1982, pp. 148-169.

5. Adam Roberts, 'Civil Resistance to Military Coups', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1975, pp. 19-36.

6. Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *The Political Economy of Human Rights, Volume I: The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism*, South End Press, Boston, 1979.