

Blurred Lines: Increased Military Engagement in Australia's Civilian-Domestic Space



The involvement of the military in Australian domestic spaces has increased significantly in the past decade. Through media engagement, community and outreach programs and increasingly, humanitarian response the military is legitimising its position in Australian civilian spaces. **But at what cost?**

Despite the high economic and social costs of 2020-2021, the Australian Government's commitment to increased spending on the tools of war has not waivered - arms, military expansion and defence marketing.

Defenceⁱ total annual budget estimate increased by **50%**; from \$30.5 billion in 2010 to \$45.5 billion in 2020ⁱⁱ. The Defence Portfolio has jumped to a planned total investment of \$575 billion by 2030ⁱⁱⁱ.

There has been no effort by the Commonwealth Government to enhance a domestic civilian capacity to deal with crises.

Increased Military Aid in Australia 2010-2020

The degree of involvement by the ADF in domestic emergencies has significantly increased since 2010; Operation Bushfire Assist 2019-2020 recorded a historic 8,236 personnel including calling up 2,500 Reserves. This was the largest mobilisation of military forces within Australia to date.

Similarly Operation Covid-19 Assist has mobilised thousands of personnel carrying out the roles of civilians, as security guards and first responders.

The critical question remains: is increased dependency on infrastructure and personnel to address disasters, to the detriment of capable, well resourced and resilient civilian responses across Australian Communities?

Who pays?

State Governments pay for the use of military with tax-payer's money. **Taxes pay to both resource and to utilise the military.**

Resourcing the military is extremely expensive.

\$14.4 billion is the estimated cost of military acquisitions (buying and maintaining military equipment) for 2020-2021.

Equipment is expensive to run and the bill is paid for by Australian Tax payers.

The MRH-90 Helicopter cost Defence **\$30,000 per hour of flight time**. Planned to be flown 9,670 hours in a year, running the helicopter costs \$290 million annual. The ADF currently has 46 of the MRH-90 helicopters.

Normalising the military presence – a deliberate approach

Militarisation is understood as the expansion of military culture, symbolism and attitudes into civilian space. It is reinforced through wide reaching and powerful media campaigns that serve to promote the military and the defence industry expansion.

Defence has the **highest advertising budget of any single government** department – in 2017-2018 it peaked at \$76.4 million – all paid for by tax payers. Marketing and advertising is an effective means of promoting Defence and normalising the military in civilian spaces.

Why does this matter?

High spending on Defence and Arms is at the cost of alternative spending options such as health, infrastructure, education, the care industry and social security. ADF has extensive outreach programs targeting young people and supporting rural indigenous communities amongst others – communities which often poor public services including health and education.

WILPF are calling for greater oversight of public spending, greater investment in building and sustaining peace and a halt to the rapid expansion of the Department of Defence and the Defence Industry in Australia.

What does a gender lens tell us about militarisation?

- **Women in Australia are much more likely to be living in poverty**, at risk of homelessness or of domestic violence. Public spending on Defence and cuts to public services and social security impact everyone, but especially poor women.
- **Militarisation reinforces 'militarised masculinities'** in which male superiority is validated through power and aggression and the glorification of strength others portrayed as weaker – including women
- **Women's experiences of the world aren't included in the traditional notion of 'security'** – the greatest danger to women is in their own home. Defence spending does not meet the security needs of women or reflect their reality.

About WILPF Australia

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom – Australia WILPF is a feminist, non-aligned, anti-war and peace-building member-based organisation. WILPF brings women together to oppose conflict, violence and global militarisation, and provides a unique space for peace activists across Australia and globally to work together for a sustainable peace.

Further details about WILPF Australia's work and information on how to join as a member is available at: wilpf.org.au and [Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Australia Militarisation in Australia: Normalisation and Mythology. May 2021.](#)

ⁱ 'Defence and the Department of Defence refers to the overarching organisation, including the Australian Defence Force (ADF), Australian Signals Directorate (ASD), and civilian elements of the 'defence' enterprise; which encompasses the whole endeavour of national 'defence', i.e. paramilitary elements such as intelligence agencies, armed elements of the Australian Border Force, and other dual-use capabilities, which also provide national defence without being managed by the Defence Department.

ⁱⁱ Defence total annual budget estimate increased nominally by 50% between 2010 and 2020, from \$30.5 billion in 2010 to \$45.5 billion in 2020