

Submission to Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee
From the University of Melbourne Peacebuilding Initiative
Into the
Inquiry into Funding for Public Research into Foreign Policy Issues

This is a crucially important inquiry, and it is being held at a particularly appropriate time. There is an urgent need to strengthen Australian foreign policy research. For example, the University of Melbourne Peacebuilding Initiative begins its recent report to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade entitled *Security Through Sustainable Peace*¹ by saying:

It is well established that violent conflict is one of the most serious impediments to human, social and economic development, and environmental wellbeing. After a period of relative decline in international conflict, we have seen a rise in its incidence and extent of casualties during the past decade. It is well understood that these challenges require political solutions. Yet despite increases in military and security spending in Australia and other countries, there has been no concurrent improvement in the level of resourcing and prioritisation of diplomatic contributions to the prevention and transformation of violent conflict.
[para 2]

One of the essential conditions for global security and wellbeing is achievement of relative peace. Peace is pursued through the prevention and transformation of violent conflicts and the conditions that give rise to these, and support for the attitudes, institutions and structures that can sustain peaceful societies. From the highest global systems of governance, there is much talk of preventing conflict and sustaining peace (such as in UN & WB, *Pathways for Peace*, 2018). This challenge is increasingly complex because we live in a time of global turbulence and uncertainty, with shifting geopolitical arrangements and increasing transnationalism and interconnectedness of global challenges. [Para 1]

Funding

This section responds to subject (a) of the Committee's terms of reference. The above Report and this submission show that Australian diplomacy is being starved of funds and so, therefore, is research on foreign affairs. The Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade and the Lowy Institute are prominent amongst many organisations and foreign policy experts who have drawn attention to the damage this severe

¹ John Langmore, Tania Miletic, Aran Martin, and Bob Breen, 2020, *Security Through Sustainable Peace: Australian International Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding*, University of Melbourne, July, ISBN 978 0 7340 5622 1

constraint has caused to DFAT's capacity to fulfill its functions.^{2,3} Crucial consequences of that denial include: the incompleteness of analysis of aspects of international relations; the lack of presentation of such analysis; and so the inhibition of much informed policy development and public discussion, debate and support for international initiatives.

Australia has not kept up its human skills or capacity to handle economic, social, environmental, security and development issues sufficiently. With flat-lining staffing levels and chronic underfunding, it is no wonder there is little capacity for DFAT staff to specialise. Several respondents said that they must run just to keep up with day-to-day affairs. Some had even been criticized for being interested in long-term thinking when it was said they should have been focused on short-term items. Add to this the fact that only approximately 23 per cent of (Australian) DFAT staff were based overseas in 2016-17, it is curious how staff are supposed to develop a sound understanding of local context to be able to appropriately monitor and respond to conflicts as they emerge.

A powerful indicator of governmental foreign policy priorities is the structure of budgetary allocations. Since the mid-nineties, DFAT's inflation-adjusted budget has slowly crept up, by a total of around 50 per cent during the quarter century. Over the same period total real Commonwealth outlays have grown by 360 per cent (C of A, 2018-19, Statement 11, Table 1), so domestic spending has received increased funding seven times larger than diplomacy. This shows the low political priority given to Australian diplomacy during the last quarter century. The proportion of total Commonwealth spending allocated to diplomacy has fallen from 0.38% in 1995-96 to 0.22% in 2018-19. That is, the proportion of Commonwealth funding used for diplomacy has declined during the last quarter century by 42%.⁴

Since this was written, the October 2020 budget announced new forward estimates for spending on diplomacy which will reduce its share of total Commonwealth outlays to 0.18% so cutting total diplomatic funding by 54% since 1995-96. This is completely contrary to Australia's national interest and entirely irresponsible at a time of increasing international insecurity.

A particularly clear example of the cost of this severe erosion is DFAT's current inability to support research funding is the establishment of the University of Melbourne's Centre for Peacebuilding. The rationale for the Centre is that contemporary conflicts occur in a web of shared global challenges, all of which require rigorous research. The Centre's mission is to promote multidisciplinary research, teaching, policy development to support effective engagement in conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the Indo-Pacific region. The Centre for Peacebuilding will provide Australia with a nationally based, high-quality, professional non-government peace centre for research and creative engagement within the region of highest

² Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Joint Standing Committee, 2012, *Australia's Overseas Representation – Punching below our weight?* Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, October.

³ In 2011, the Lowy Institute reported that DFAT had 37 per cent less Australia-based staff abroad than it did in 1988-89. The report added that staffing in the Federal public sector had grown by 61 per cent since 1997-98, including a growth of almost 40 per cent at the Department of Defence. In contrast, DFAT staffing had essentially flat-lined. Since then, not much has changed.

⁴ *Security Through Sustainable Peace*, pp 44 and 45

priority to Australia, the Indo-Pacific region. The lack of such an Australian centre has contributed to the inattention to diplomacy in Australia. There has been no institution urging the necessity for upgrading both government and non-government attention to diplomacy.

The consequence has been that all Australian governments have allowed the proportion of Commonwealth spending on diplomacy since 1995-96 to be halved. When DFAT has needed expert peacebuilding assistance from outside the public service it has had to engage consultants from Europe and North America. Sometimes that will be adequate, but it is a gap in Australia's capacity to attempt to resolve conflicts.

The Centre for Peacebuilding being established at the University of Melbourne will fill that gap and strengthen public understanding of the necessity for high quality conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The central purpose of the Centre is to prevent or mitigate violent international or intra-national conflict and to promote peacebuilding initiatives. Filling that gap is a necessary condition for Australia to maximise its contribution to the range of available means of peacebuilding in the Indo-Pacific region. It is also imperative for fulfilling our responsibilities as a Member State of the United Nations. Peaceful conflict resolution, wherever it is possible, is by far the most humane and cost-effective means for strengthening national security.

The Centre for Peacebuilding (CfP) will offer rigorous research into the causes of conflict, capacity to organise and strengthen dialogue, to think imaginatively about means for preventing violent conflict and for strengthening peacebuilding, through substantially enhancing availability of expert scholars and experienced peacebuilding practitioners.

The University of Melbourne is an excellent location for an Australian-based Centre for Peacebuilding. As one of Australia's leading universities Melbourne is a leading convenor of talent across many complementary fields, including political and economic analysis and policy, human rights, constitutional and migration law, psychological, sociological, and anthropological analysis, environmental and geographic planning, and public health planning and promotion. This will provide a strong capacity for interdisciplinary cooperation in peacebuilding.

The University is establishing the Centre within the Faculty of Arts, governed by a Board from within and outside the University and with an initial staff of six scholars and/or practitioners or both and support staff. The annual cost will be around \$2m a year, about \$10m for the first five years.

Funds are principally being sought from Australian and international philanthropists and foundations, Australian Departments such as Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence, and research funding. Operational consultancies are likely to provide a significant source of revenue. Yet when requested for support DFAT immediately replied that it did not have the capacity to provide funding at present. This contrasts with most of the other potential donors who have been asked for funding support. Most are carefully considering how much they will be able to offer, The University and two private donors have already given the funds which are enabling the Centre to commence work. The University prefers to entitle the Centre the Peacebuilding Initiative until sufficient funds are available to ensure its firm establishment.

This submission therefore urges the Committee to strongly recommend that

1. **The long-term trend of reducing the proportion of Commonwealth funding for diplomacy be ended; and that it be replaced by sustained implementation of a goal of steadily increasing the real level of budgeting for diplomacy until substantial progress**

- has been made towards restoring the DFAT's funding sufficiently to allow it to effectively fulfill all its purposes.
2. Within that growing budget funding for foreign affairs research be substantially increased to enable universities and think tanks with a recognised capacity to undertake rigorous research to have a far more readily available source to which they can apply for funding.
 3. That within that growing source DFAT begin immediately to provide annual support for the research by the University of Melbourne Centre for Peacebuilding.

This latter recommendation may seem rather self-interested. However, the reasons it is made without blushing have already been mentioned. The Centre will be unique in Australia since it will include all the following purposes: rigorous research, direct engagement with conflict prevention and peacebuilding, teaching and public education. It will be located within the University of Melbourne Faculty of Arts which is rated 18th amongst the Arts and Humanities Faculties in the world; where it has full support of the University's management; and on which it will be able to draw for multidisciplinary collaboration.⁵

It is important to note in the conclusion to this section that it was a struggle to obtain any funds for the research which led to the Report entitled *Security Through Sustainable Peace*. DFAT agreed to provide \$100,000 and with that example, four units within Melbourne University contributed a matching total of \$100,000. An application for an ARC Linking grant was refused despite one of the assessors reporting that the applicants were a 'dream team'. The ARC would make no comment on why they refused funding, so it was impossible to learn from months of work preparing the detailed proposal why it was not funded. Whatever the reason it suggests that ARC funding is inadequate for the support of all the outstanding proposals seeking support. Therefore, another recommendation of the Committee should be:

That Government substantially increase funding for Arts and Humanities research so that a higher proportion of the excellent proposals for research can be funded. This experience suggests that the structure of evaluation for foreign affairs research needs to be changed and substantially upgraded. A logical approach would be to establish a Foreign Affairs Research Evaluation Council with members from each of DFAT, universities and think tanks and with much enhanced funding, focus on the most urgently required and valuable research with both short and long-term goals in mind.

In the absence of such funding, the key factor enabling the research described above evaluating Australian experience with conflict prevention and peacebuilding to proceed was that two of the researchers gave without payment large parts of their time to the interviewing, analysis, and the drafting of the reports for the Department and for publication. This was generous, but it is clearly a weakness of the current funding and form of organisation that overcoming these hurdles depending on the voluntary donation of time. Far more substantial provision of funding for research and clearer processes of evaluating proposals are essential.

A couple of years earlier we had proposed to the Department preparation of a report on *State Support for Peace Processes: A Multi-Country Review*. DFAT supported the idea with a grant of \$50,000. Other philanthropic donors contributed a total of \$40,000. The study involved assigning each of the contributors the task of researching and writing a chapter on one of the seven countries reviewed. Each of the participants were able to use their research time as lecturers and research scholars to participate in the project. The School of Social and

⁵ QS World University Rankings by Subject 2021: Arts & Humanities.

Political Sciences contributed to various costs along the way such as holding a day-long seminar on the issues and printing of the report. The Report was published by the DFAT⁶.

Even though these two experiences involved working with inadequate funding and therefore somewhat makeshift arrangements, they finally led to satisfactory products which expand thought about important aspects of DFAT responsibilities. They reflect well on the trust between Departmental officers and university academics and on their willingness to collaborate in both research and in writing up and publishing the results. These studies were ways of addressing important questions which had slipped into relative neglect because of the Department's inadequate funding

Mobilising Public Engagement

Security Through Sustainable Peace discussed subject (c and d) in your terms of reference. It is worth quoting two sections in full.

Engagement with Academia, NGOs, and Interest Groups⁷

Since the first Australian Ministry for External Relations was founded in the forties there have been many examples of effective external communication, between DFAT and parliament, media, academia, development organisations, the AIIA, UNAA, civil society – faith groups, service clubs, trade unions, professional organisations – companies, trade groups, schools and so on, and this should be continued and expanded. One difficulty for diplomatic staff is simply finding time for such contact. There is also a risk of ill-defined boundaries relating to sharing of information and ideas, but the tendency is often to be over-protective of material learnt through official circles, even though much of that is publicly available to anyone who searches online with reasonable thoughtfulness. Building public knowledge and respect for DFAT is vital to strengthening support for its perspectives and activities. Generosity with communication is a relatively low cost means of generating understanding and sympathy not only for the Department but also for government policies and perspectives.

The approaches mentioned above can be cost-effective ways to strengthen public support and discussion, and/or to draw on expert opinion available from academia, business, and civil society while doing so.

In various areas of DFAT responsibility there have been advisory committees or regular forums for discussion. At various times these have included, for example: human rights; nuclear weapons; Australia's role as an elected member of the Security Council; development policy; and groups focusing on relations between Australia and particular other countries. They take significant organisation time, a diversion which may not be welcomed, but they not only provide opportunities for democratic reporting but also generate comment and

⁶ John Langmore, Tania Miletic, Aran Martin, and Nathan Shea, 2017, *State Support for Peace Processes: A Multi-Country Review*, published by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and printed by the University of Melbourne

⁷ *Security Through Sustainable Peace*, pp 31 and 32

ideas which can stretch possibilities and even imagination about possible initiatives.

Numbers of respondents spoke of the benefits of drawing on such scholarly, cultural, and other professional expertise. There could also be significant usefulness in appointing more advisory groups of academics and civil society leaders for swift advice, provision of expert comments and preparation of reports. This is still happening, but the practice could be significantly expanded with net benefits. Such advisory groups facilitate the formation of professional networks which can be called on for swift comment. Networking is a vital and cost-effective skill. An expert group could also be assigned small funds for sponsoring public discussion; creating opportunities for generating public discussion; and being ready to undertake tasks for the minister and department. Organisation of such groups takes time and modest cost (provided they do not meet too frequently) but their value can be substantial to both the Department and to strengthening public understanding.

The use of multitrack and Track II diplomacy has increased in recent times as diversity of international relations issues has increased and the number and quality of people with expertise in universities, think tanks, INGOs, and retired diplomats has grown. Track II meetings can be a productive way of enabling dialogue, widening debate and of injecting additional possibilities into a jammed negotiation. For example, when there were limited opportunities for official bilateral contact between Australia and Myanmar, Track II and III initiatives presented an opportunity for communication and dialogue.

Track II diplomacy depends on the existence of trusted and admired professionals who could widen the knowledge and imagination of policy practitioners identifying possible mechanisms for improving communication and breaking log jams. It requires willingness to innovate and take risks. Greater use of Track II methodology is recommended. Establishment of an Australian Institute for Peace would provide an ideal centre for organisation of such Track II meetings.

In conflict situations, community-led and community-based engagement are of great importance, for which civil society can often contribute most. There can be great organisational value in appointing highly experienced people from other fields such as development organisations, academia, business and so on to appropriate positions where their experience will diversify the range of skills and knowledge available to the Department.

DFAT and individual diplomats could usefully join the international networks engaged with peace processes. Various international peace organisations run conferences and training programs with which it would be imperative for a conflict prevention and peacebuilding unit within DFAT to establish and keep in close contact. Encouraging staff engagement in professional networks, forums and learning exchanges internationally will enhance Australian diplomatic capacity, networking communication and specialisation.

The other section also makes some comments which could be useful.⁸

There is a view that an underlying limitation on mobilising public engagement is that ‘there is no domestic constituency for DFAT’. That may be a significant factor but perhaps it overstates the situation. It is true that Australian news media give relatively little attention to international issues compared with European and North American counterparts. Australian politics is predominantly focused on domestic issues, and national governments tend to be more interested in domestic than international affairs. However, 28 per cent of Australians were born overseas, over 50 per cent have parents who were, and a high proportion of all citizens travel overseas regularly. Secondary school teachers report a high level of interest amongst senior students about global issues. University enrolments in international relations have been amongst the fastest areas of growth during the last decade. The thousands of applicants for employment in DFAT every year also clearly show the strength of interest in international relations.

The aid NGOs through which around one and a half million Australians actively contribute to development are by far the largest and strongest organisations engaged with foreign affairs. AIIA and the UNAA are long established, active, and respected organisations which both educate their members and provide forums where issues can be debated, and intellectual and political analysis strengthened. Many Australian universities and The Lowy Institute provide similar high-quality opportunities for presenting and provoking discussion, as do community organisations like Rotary and U3A.

There is a constant need for public education about foreign policy and development issues. The Department is normally willing to participate in these forums, but it could do more to build these networks. It is vital that not only the Minister and any assistant ministers but also senior DFAT staff seize whatever opportunities are available for public presentations about issues and policies. The extent of support for aid, for example, depends on increasing knowledge and understanding about the uses of aid, and of its effectiveness. A recent Australian survey concluded that when shown evidence of an aid project which met need in developing countries, the proportion of those who thought Australia did not give enough aid increased (Wood and Hoy, 2018). The strongest motive for giving aid was altruism, and the second most significant reason was enlightened Australian national interest.

When conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities are strengthened, it will be valuable to enhance public engagement strategies. Once the strategies are underway and secure, there may well be substantial interest in methodology and effectiveness, particularly in a world in which most news is about aggression, disruption, and death. Public communication strategies must seek to engage media organisations on the complexity of conflict-affected settings, the decision-making processes, and the extent of risks in those environments.

Australia’s ability to enhance its resources and reach in this field could be aided through wider governmental and public knowledge of the various ways in which Australia has been making modest but significant contributions internationally. DFAT could, at appropriate times, make more explicit how conflict

⁸ *Security Through Sustainable Peace*, pp 43 and 44

prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding policy align with national interests, geopolitical risk, regional responsibility, and comparative advantage. Suggestions relating to efforts to enhance the articulation and communication of the role of conflict prevention and peacebuilding include making policy statements which aim to ensure a shift in mindset to understand conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding as tools that are not only applicable to a development context. The aim would be to increase understanding that these tools have the greatest application in areas of national interest and greatest geopolitical risk to Australia, including great power rivalry and competition in East Asia. Examples of pathways known to increase the relevance of peace processes in all geographic areas may be particularly valuable in communication about issue areas where Australia has comparatively weaker material levers to influence outcomes.

Once additional and focused approaches are adopted and tested, a point should be reached where it would be possible to consider investing greater resources in promoting conflict prevention and peacebuilding practice and exporting Australian expertise internationally.

A requirement would be to increase awareness of DFAT capabilities and functions among international partners. One way to achieve this would be to increase the distribution and promotion of DFAT and government publications in key issue areas relating to conflict prevention, peacemaking, and peacebuilding to diverse international audiences of practice. Once the Diplomatic Academy has established courses in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, ensuring that diplomats and peacemakers from other countries are invited and supported in participating would obviously be desirable (much like the international exchange program practiced in the DFAT graduate training program). When funds are available there would be great value in supporting the establishment of such centres in other countries.

There is certainly a need to increase public awareness of the experiences and contributions of DFAT and to seek to mobilise public support and engagement. One of the specified purposes of the Centre for Peacebuilding is to establish a network of people with a professional interest in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. There are two or three dozen university academics in Australia with substantial professional interest in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The CfP will establish an active network between them and hold an annual conference at which research can be presented and results circulated.

We are also already in the process of building formal and informal links with peace centres in other countries such as the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies in Cambodia, the Oriental and African Studies University and Reconciliation Resources based in London and with a branch in Australia; Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue in Geneva and equivalent centres in New Zealand, Norway, and Washington.

Strategies for building the knowledge needed to support more effective foreign policy

Section (e) of your terms of reference is discussed extensively in the early sections of

Chapter 3 of the Report. These follow, with a few revisions in square brackets. Deletions are noted by three dots

Political Leadership and Foreign Policy Strategy

It became clear from the survey of the experiences of Australian diplomats that the key determinant of whether Australia plays an effective role in international conflict prevention and peacebuilding is whether the government of the day decides to do so. Political timeliness and motivation, the strength of engagement with a situation or issue, the degree of political attention to a conflict, the level of knowledge of the situation and the people involved, availability of funding and personnel resources, and the personalities of leaders are all influential. But each of those depends on the key issue which is the strength of the commitments by the Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Minister for Defence and other members of Cabinet's National Security Committee and other members of Parliament to attempting to address a given [issue or] conflict. [Foreign policy including peace] processes will not become a significant focus of Australian [public] policy unless they become political issues.

Departmental heads and officers also have significant leverage. They are likely to be acutely aware that a particular [issue or] conflict is or may become damaging to a country or region where it is occurring. They are also likely to be concerned about whether there is potential for Australia to play a constructive role. It is part of the Department's responsibility to increase the minister's awareness of potential actions which Australia could take. Norms exist now which encourage that to happen.

Several factors could contribute to making engagement with conflict prevention or peace processes of greater political concern. The most obvious is clarifying the potential benefits of reducing death and destruction by minimising violence and the costs of violence, and the availability of appropriate and viable options for supporting peace processes. Articulation of a strategy which focuses attention on conflict prevention and peacebuilding while continuing to recognise the importance and benefit of adequate defence and intelligence capacity is vital. The title that expresses such a strategy is for 'Security through sustainable peace'. Australians want governments to aim for security: strategic foreign policy without military action is the optimal and most efficient way to achieve this.

Australian engagement in conflict prevention and peacebuilding as part of foreign policy is in Australia's national interests. Security is central to the national interest, but security is more than a strategic concept in the lives of most people and communities. Security has economic, financial, social, and environmental dimensions. 'Realist theorists' of international relations argue that the national interest is in maximizing military power (Morgenthau, 1954: 5, 10), but this is empirically naïve. In democracies governments give high priorities to the policies which will enable them to be re-elected and these will often be those which contribute most to the wellbeing of voters, their living standards, employment opportunities, standards of education and health services and so on – that is, to the quality of government. Many governments do want international influence, but in the current era this is derived more from economic than military power, and the quality of diplomacy is often more effective as an expression of national power....

Leaders of various parts of Australian society frequently speak as if

Australia's national interests are clear and all that is required is patriotic loyalty to them. Politicians sometimes argue that because their preferred policy is in the national interest any disagreement is disloyal. But they rarely describe what they mean by the national interest. Like other countries, Australia is composed of groups with widely different interests based on characteristics such as their occupations, incomes, organisational affiliations, location, beliefs and world views and there is often competition between these interests and international commitments and imperatives. Foreign policy decision-makers have a complex task to strike a balance, 'between domestic demands and international imperatives, between principle and pragmatism, between idealistic values and material interests, between what is expedient and what is the right thing to do, between the national constituency and the international community, and between the immediate, medium and long terms'.⁹

At a time of global turbulence, it is vital that greater effort be put into imaginatively identifying what international strategy will most fully express Australia's national interests. Opportunities to revise Australia's foreign policy exist and a more independent, sophisticated, and nuanced view about Australia's national interests is warranted. This was a goal of the *Australian Foreign Affairs White Paper* tabled by former Foreign Minister Julie Bishop in late 2017.

At present, when the international rule of law is being challenged by a few major countries, strengthening alliances with like-minded countries which continue to be committed to maintaining the rules-based international order is vital (*The Economist*, 4Aug18: 42-44). A framework of regular multilateral and regional meetings is crucially important for addressing many of the security, economic, social, and environmental issues which are global and/or regional in nature. So too is sustaining friendships with leaders in the US who continue to support the rule of law. Strengthening bilateral relations with countries with which Australia has particularly crucial economic, strategic, environmental, and social interdependencies is crucial. For example, seeking to implement comprehensively the planned annual Prime Ministerial and focused ministerial meetings with China, India and Indonesia would be a clear expression of a wish to attempt harmonious agreements on as many issues of shared interest as possible. Building regional cooperative arrangements is a beneficial mechanism for enhanced security. The sustained effectiveness of such a strategy and range of cooperative arrangements depends in large part on the professionalism of departmental staff work. Former Foreign Minister Gareth Evans argues eloquently for this approach, which he summarises as:

Less America. More Asia, more self-reliance. Which means not walking away from the US alliance...but being more circumspect about over-reliance upon it for security...and acting as genuine diplomatic free agent – creative, proactive, and not constantly looking over our shoulder to Washington. And strengthening relationships at all levels with key regional neighbours like India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Japan, and South Korea – and trying to develop a more multidimensional relationship with China, especially by working with it in multilateral

⁹ *Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, 2013: p21

forums on global and regional public goods like the environment, development, peacekeeping, and arms control. ...[E]very state's security, prosperity and quality of life is best advanced by cooperation rather than confrontation, and that Australia should be a relentless campaigner for just that (Evans, *AFR*, 22 June 18).

The findings from this study indicated that there has generally been low public profiling of Australia's varied and positive diplomatic contributions to international peacemaking and peacebuilding. The public has limited knowledge of Australian support for peace processes. If support for peace processes is like that in the UK, there would be electoral as well as national interest reasons for substantially enhancing national peace processes.

To transform the political attention given to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Australia there would have to be a significant organisational change to ensure that this decision was expressed in the machinery of government. A few countries have established a cabinet position of Minister for Peace, sometimes supported by a Department for Peace. In a version of this approach, the New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern re-created the position of Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control and allocated the responsibility to Winston Peters, who is also Deputy Prime Minister. He is supported by the Division for International Security and Disarmament in the NZ Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade. This is not essential if the Minister for Foreign Affairs has explicit responsibility for Australian conflict prevention and peacebuilding. However, there would be great value in the appointment of a Parliamentary Secretary on Peace Processes. It is positive that the recommendation contained in an earlier draft of this report for the appointment of an ambassador for disarmament was implemented by Foreign Minister Marise Payne through the appointment of senior DFAT officer Amanda Gorely as Ambassador for Arms Control and Counter Proliferation in December 2019.

Renewed commitment to conflict prevention and peacebuilding is vital to Australian safety, prosperity and the common good. The Minister for Foreign Affairs must have principal political responsibility for articulating, planning, and implementing that goal and in leading the departmental attention to conflict situations and peace processes.

Encouraging members of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade and the Australian Parliament to join in early warning, conflict analysis and fact-finding functions would draw parliament into discussion of government responses to conflict on a bipartisan basis.

Renewing the Policy Base

International interventions require a strong policy base. A political, institutional, and financial framework that would allow the government to contribute to regional and international prevention and peace efforts in a strategic way is essential. The Conflict and Fragility Framework (2011) and associated [Departmental] Guidance Notes provide direction and legitimacy for staff on the ground, though they are not comprehensive or up-to-date reflections of existing

policy and programming. There is a need to renew and develop the policy base from which DFAT can guide its role, interests, program decisions and resourcing. To build on this foundation, it would be appropriate to consider:

Preparation of high-level policy leading to a Ministerial statement on conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding would be particularly valuable, and would conceptually unite the framework for 'Sustaining Peace' as a cross cutting whole-of-government policy priority.

Designing the objectives and plans for implementation of the policy for coordination across government would be a whole-of-government national action plan. Regular reporting cycles on progress with implementation could be led by the Foreign Minister.

A vital dimension of organisational reform is that expertise and capacity for organising conflict prevention and peacebuilding be represented in the Cabinet's National Security Committee (of which the Foreign Minister has always been a member) and in the Secretaries' Committee on National Security. A recent addition to the Secretaries committee has been the head of the newly established Office of National Intelligence which is being established to upgrade the previous Office of National Assessments. This is essential for ensuring that possibilities for easing the intensity of conflict and seeking to prevent violence are explicitly considered early in discussion of how to attempt to prevent or limit violent conflict. An essential condition for such organisational reform must include establishment of enhanced capacity within DFAT for advising, providing, and mobilising professional peace-making personnel. This is the organisational approach used by the UK Government which includes the Minister for International Development amongst the members of the British National Security Council, which allocates half of the generous national ODA program to supporting peacebuilding programs in unstable and fragile states. ...

DFAT's focus and engagement with peace processes must be strengthened. The organisational dimension of that must include major strengthening of the resources on which the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Departmental Secretary can reliably draw as the source of advice for their contributions to the discussions about conflict prevention and peacebuilding of the National Security Committees.

When the authors raised the possibility of establishing a specialised unit for work on peace processes support, there were mixed opinions that connect to a longer-standing debate about the degree of specialisation or generalist training that diplomats require. The DFAT tradition is for diplomats to be generalists. Many interviewees, though, supported the idea of a special section with professional capacity to lead policy and strategy in relation to responding to conflict and peacebuilding, though some were opposed. There are advantages and disadvantages of both a specialist unit and of the alternative of experienced peacebuilders spread through the department. A specialist peacebuilding unit or a reformulation of the sections that currently relate to engagement in conflict into a more coherent division could hold several diplomats with professional training in

peace processes. The unit could also routinely gather experiences from others who are working in countries where there is conflict. It could be a point of reference for comment and advice on mechanisms for handling conflict. Since every conflict is different and there are no panaceas that will automatically translate from one situation to another, accumulating experience is an essential means of strengthening possibilities and even imagination about what might work.

Foreign affairs departments in other countries are organised and structured in various ways (Langmore, et al. 2017). Some countries, like the UK, tend to use specialisation, though this also reflects the different resourcing of DFID compared to DFAT. DFAT recognises that specialisation is valuable and so has engaged in bringing in consultants. Staff were positive about the engagement of consultants, especially those few who were regularly engaged as peace and conflict specialists, (though due to funding and other limitations) these consultants are no longer available to DFAT. Specialisation would require greater recognition and clearer pathways within the system. There would be value in establishing a specialised unit within DFAT with experts trained in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The Department should not have to make a choice between generalists and specialists. The researchers concluded that both are essential, and the requirement is that DFAT become sufficiently well-funded to make adequate employment of both possible. There is a need for the fostering of high-level expertise through the creation of specialised roles and for the continuing engagement of specialised advisors in peace and conflict.

This report strongly recommends that both a section of the Department specialising in peace processes be established; and that diplomatic staff with expertise in conflict prevention and peacebuilding also be included within the functional branches working on particular countries and geographic areas.

Ministerial visits and senior leader engagement with staff and programming in fragile and conflict affected areas has served a vitally important support function and should be further encouraged. Visits by Prime Ministers, Ministers and senior leaders provide a key sense of support for staff on the ground, and opportunities to “convey what was happening directly to a senior level” to get feedback, and to establish a rapport and a common understanding. Strengthening the engagement of Parliament with the issues of conflict prevention and peace is also vitally important.

The potentially high value, benefits, and effectiveness of diplomatic engagement in conflict prevention, dialogue, negotiation, and mediation to reduce the intensity of conflict and the risk of violence, and dramatically saving resources must be more actively explained and demonstrated to Ministers and the broader public. The researchers conclude that ministerial reaffirmation of the centrality of lively and mature diplomacy to national security and peace is vital.

Conclusion

There is substantially more in *Security Through Sustainable Peace* which is relevant to your inquiry. An online version of the report is submitted with this submission, and printed

copies are available from Dr Nathan Bond, Centre for Peacebuilding, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Melbourne, Carlton, Vic 3010.

- Departmental structure and functions
- Training and preparation
- Knowledge management
- Length of postings and handover procedures
- Supporting mechanisms
- Taking and compensating for risks
- Multilateral collaboration
- Conflict intervention and engagement in peacebuilding
- Peace operations
- Women, peace, and security
- Disarmament

This submission and the *Security Through Sustainable Peace* report end with the same conclusion:

This [submission] attests to the necessity for DFAT to be funded sufficiently to have the fiscal, human, and intellectual resources to fulfil the purposes for which it was established and of which it has been denied for the last quarter century. As Australia's experience demonstrates, interventions in conflict and instability must prioritise diplomatic engagement and seek political solutions. This learning stands in contradiction to increasing trends of militarisation and securitisation.

This [submission identifies ways of contributing] to the maintenance of knowledge and experience of one valuable aspect of diplomatic engagement; and proposes multiple pathways for improving conflict prevention and peacebuilding capacity. The emergent recommendations [could be] a part of Australia's ongoing efforts to enhance its capacity to pursue its national interests and strengthen its role in contributing to global security through sustainable peace.

Professor John Langmore AM and Dr Tania Miletic

28 March 2021