

Inquiry: The International armed conflict decision making

Submission from Peter Sainsbury 16 October 2022

- Many thanks for giving me the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry.
- Congratulations on establishing the inquiry. It is much needed.
- I am a private Australian citizen. I have never served in the armed forces. I am not an expert in military matters.
- I am very interested in public policy in general and have long been active in politics, both as a member of political parties and as a member of non-government organisations.
- I am not a pacifist but I very much regret the readiness of the Australian and other governments to enter into armed conflicts during the course of my lifetime. In my view, there are many occasions when governments, including Australian governments:
 - have paid inadequate attention to diplomacy to avoid armed conflict;
 - have entered into armed conflict with unclear aims and/or have entered into armed conflicts without being honest with their citizens about the aims;
 - have actively misled their citizens about the reasons for the armed conflict, the aims of the conflict, the methods used during the conflict and the price being paid by both civilians and members of the armed forces in all the countries/parties involved in the conflict.
- I am 100% confident that in no election that I have been involved with during the last 50 years has any political party included entering into or continuing an armed conflict been part of the election discussions – i.e. never has the electorate been asked to include such an issue in their deliberations about whom to vote for.
- Consequently, I do not regard any government as having had a mandate from the electorate to enter into or continue an armed conflict.
- Entering and continuing an armed conflict are, for obvious reasons, probably the most serious decisions a government can make and yet they do it without any consultation with their citizens in my experience. This is astonishing and entirely inappropriate, undemocratic and unsatisfactory, in my view.
- The fact that these decisions seem to be made often by the Prime Minister alone or by the Prime Minister and a very small number of elected and unelected officials rather than the whole cabinet, or the whole governing party or the parliament as a whole makes the situation even more astonishing and unsatisfactory.
- Before entering an armed conflict, governments should be required to at least:
 - Inform the citizens about the reasons for and the aims of the proposed conflict;
 - Justify to the public the proposed conflict ethically;
 - Enable the proposal to be debated by parliament.
 - All of these should be done in good faith with as much honesty and transparency as possible bearing in mind the obvious need for security in armed conflicts.
- I strongly recommend that the inquiry recommends that the decision for Australia to enter into an armed conflict should be preceded by meeting these requirements.

Anything less makes a mockery of Australia's claim to be an open, democratic society.

- Thank you.