

# PEACE & SECURITY UPDATES

April 2025

## AUSTRALIAN PEACE AND SECURITY FORUM

The APSF, a not-for-profit association, is a broad network of informed researchers and professionals working to strengthen peace and security for all Australians by providing information, analysis and opportunities for dialogue with Government and civil society.

For more information about APSF, please visit our website below.



## China is both a challenge and a contributor to Australia's security

While China may at times be a challenge to Australia's security, this does not necessarily mean that China is a security threat, according to Dr Vince Scappatura, Lecturer in International Studies at Macquarie University. China is seen by Australian Government as a threat to security in the South China Sea but China has also been a major contributor to reducing the climate change threat to our security through the production and export of solar panels that have enabled Australia's renewable energy revolution, explained Dr Scappatura. Compare this with recent announcement by the Trump administration 'to keep the world hooked on fossil fuels', he said.

Dr Scappatura and Professor Jocelyn Chey of the Institute for Australian and Chinese Arts and Culture at Western Sydney University spoke at an APSF webinar on 18 March on the theme **"Does China threaten Australia's future peace and security?"**

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*China's expenditure on arms as a percent of GDP is less than that of India, Vietnam and even Australia*

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The United States and China are contesting for great power supremacy. Australia depends on the United States for security; and on China for our economic prosperity, with China accounting for a third of all our exports.

Australia's Defence Minister Richard Marles has suggested that China's military build up is the largest and most ambitious since the end of World War II. Dr Scappatura disputed this pointing to the far larger and faster build up of arms by the US and the former Soviet Union during the Cold War.

“China’s expenditure on arms as a percent of GDP is less than that of India, Vietnam and even Australia,” he said.

Many Australians don’t realize how fast China’s economy has grown and how it now rivals that of the US. China’s arms expenditure is around \$470 billion per annum, a fraction of the \$1.3 trillion arms expenditure of the USA, he said. Since the end of the Cold War, the US has spent \$19 trillion on arms, \$16 trillion more than China. “If China’s nuclear arsenal is facing Australia, it is because of the large US presence in military bases in Australia”, he said.

Professor Chey reflected on the evolution of Australia’s relations with China beginning in the 1950s. When China was dealing with a famine in the late 1950s, Australia responded with several shipments of wheat showing our willingness to trust China. This trust provided the basis for the negotiations in the early 1970’s that led to Australia’s iron ore exports to China.

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*Eleven million Chinese graduate each year from its universities.*

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China today remains strongly committed to multilateralism, globalization and the rules-based international order. But we have not seen the same commitment to the international system from the US, commented Professor Chey. “In my view, the greatest change in China over the past 20 years has been the change in attitudes in the population. Eleven million Chinese graduate each year from its universities. Young people are now part of the international community of ideas and information.” she said. China is integrated into the global economy and the major challenges we face, such as climate change need international cooperation, she explained.

Prof Chey conclude with several quotes from a recent press conference with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (available on YouTube). Wang Yi said “we will provide certainty to this uncertain

world” and “we will be a just and righteous force for international peace and security...and we will observe the purposes and principles of the UN Charter.”

The video of the Webinar is available on the [APSF website](#).

### Australia increases overseas aid

The Federal Government’s 2025/26 budget includes a commitment to increase Australia’s Official Development Assistance (ODA) to \$5.1 billion, an increase of \$136 million on the current year’s allocation. The Government has also renewed its commitment to continue to increase aid.



DFAT Photo

Congratulations to the Government for breaking the trend among donors across Europe to cut aid and shift spending to defence and domestic priorities. The abolition of the US AID program by the President Trump cut delivery of urgent food supplies, drinking water and lifesaving medicines to millions of poor and displaced people, having a deadly effect on malnourished children. According to media reports, the Federal Coalition has been toying with the idea of cutting aid to increase defence spending. Hopefully the Government’s strong commitment to increased aid will put an end to such ideas.

The [Budget summary](#) notes that “we face a new challenge, with traditional development partners

dramatically reducing ODA levels” and announces that Australia is “responding to this challenge by reprioritising our development investments to bolster support to our region.”

The Budget provides \$1 billion over five years to help build economic resilience in Pacific and Southeast Asian countries, including expanding access to finance for small businesses, creating jobs and strengthening financial systems

The Budget also includes \$15 million grant to the UN Peacebuilding Fund, announced by Foreign Minister Senator Penny Wong at the UN General Assembly last September.

## Climate Disruption, Peace and Security

By Emeritus Prof Ian Lowe, Distinguished Prof Penny Sackett and Prof Anne Poelina



“Climate change now represents the greatest threat to the future and security of Australians,” was the clear conclusion of the Australian Security Leaders Climate Group in March 2022. This group of retired senior defence and security leaders cited not only the direct impacts of global heating and the extreme weather it causes on the health and wellbeing of Australians, but also its effects on supply chains and world food prices, leading to social unrest and “increasing instability, conflict and forced migration from neighbouring nations”

Within our region, these experienced security experts described climate change as “an existential threat to nations and communities.” The threat is compounded by a decreased readiness of defence forces to fulfil their primary role as they become overstretched by relief efforts after climate-fuelled disasters.

Scientists increasingly use the term climate disruption to communicate the gravity of this global emergency. The crisis is already upon us with devastating consequences, and Australians are disproportionately affected. In addition to unprecedented extremes, some areas of Australia going from disastrous drought, heat and bushfires

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2024 was the hottest year ever recorded

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to equally disastrous rainfall and flooding in just a few years.

The impact of climate disruption is hitting harder and sooner than scientists previously expected. The recent World Meteorological Organization report shows that 2024 was the hottest year ever recorded, with global average temperature 1.55 °C above the average from 1850 to 1900. Many risks that 20 years ago were thought possible only after temperature increases of 3 to 4 degrees are now thought to be imminent. After being briefed on a confidential, yet-to-be-released report on the likely consequences for Australia, independent Senator David Pocock told a journalist that the warning from our national security agency was “frankly terrifying.”

But the greater worry is the risk of crossing tipping points in the whole Earth system. These are thresholds which, if crossed, lead to abrupt, far-reaching and effectively irreversible changes. Examples include permanent dieback of forests, changes in ocean circulation that would permanently alter rainfall patterns, loss of ice that would accelerate sea level rise, destruction of all the world’s coral reefs, and melting of permafrost that would dramatically accelerate global warming.

The only way to avoid these potentially catastrophic outcomes is to reduce rapidly the release of greenhouse gases. Current ambitions are woefully inadequate. The International Energy Agency concluded in 2021 that the only way to halt the increase in global temperature was to eliminate new fossil fuel projects from that date: no new coal mines, no new oil or gas fields, and no coal-fired power stations that do not capture their emissions. Given what is at stake, and the urgency with which action must be taken, Australia's current approach to fossil fuel development is totally irresponsible, as is that of many other nations.

Disruption of the climate that is our life support system is the most urgent demonstration of our inappropriate engagement with the natural systems of this ancient continent. We need to develop Earth-centred governance, drawing on the traditional knowledge and ancient wisdom of the First Australians. In particular, their commitment to balance, co-existence and peace should be the basis of a new Dream, enabling us to make peace with them and with the natural world.

## What was that all about Alfie?

Four million Australians living in Australia's third largest city and the heavily populated regions nearby were warned to get ready for Tropical Cyclone Alfred. While the winds were less intense than expected, the erosion of iconic beaches along 600 kms of coast and the intensity of the rainfall and the consequent widespread flooding was extraordinary.

The Climate Council has just released a report – "[Eye of the Storm](#)" – that unpacks the science behind the unusual cyclone. It concludes that the intensity and devastation of the event was fueled by climate pollution in three ways:



1. Record hot ocean temperatures in the Coral Sea over summer 2024-25 helped fuel its intensity.
2. Storm surges and wind-driven waves from Tropical Cyclone Alfred rode on higher seas, made worse by climate change.
3. A hotter, wetter atmosphere made the extreme rainfall worse than it otherwise would have been.

Read [Eye of the Storm](#)



UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

## A break-in at US Peace Institute

After the Trump administration fired most of the board of the US Institute of Peace (USIP), the vandals from the DOGE occupied USIP's Washington headquarters on Monday 17 March.

Former USIP President and CEO, George Moose (fired 2 days earlier), said: "Doge has broken into our building." The CEO vowed legal action, saying: "What has happened here today is an illegal takeover by elements of the executive branch of a private non-profit."

An executive order that Donald Trump signed last month targeted the organization, which was created by Congress more than 40 years ago, and others for reductions. For more details on [the break-in](#).

Source: DEVEX 18 March 2025



# The Peacebuilding Commission at 20:

## Progress, Challenges, and the Road Ahead

**Security Council Report** March 2025

The review of the peacebuilding architecture (PBAR) of the UN has entered its formal phase of discussions at the UN Peacebuilding Commission. To coincide with this new phase, the Security Council Report has reviewed the past 20 years, highlighting both the PBC's achievements and limitations. The report explores how the PBC can refine its role, overcome key barriers to effectiveness, and enhance its responsiveness to country needs.

The fourth PBAR review comes at a time of significant geopolitical divisions and escalating risk of conflict in many parts of the world, underscoring the urgent need to act on recommendations from current and past reviews.

An eminent persons group was established to review the PBC and one of the group's conclusions pointed to implementation gaps in past recommendations and urged the PBAR to prioritise actionable steps, including scaling sustainable financing, deepening inclusive participation, and strengthening the PBC as a global platform for prevention and impact

Over the past two decades, the PBC has strengthened partnerships across the UN system and beyond by acting as a convener, bringing together stakeholders such as land management and youth empowerment initiatives. It has also made efforts to work more closely with regional and subregional organisations and other relevant actors, such as civil society and the private sector.

However, African Union member countries in the PBC have consistently called for these efforts to go further, advocating for the annual AUPSC-PBC meetings to be used more strategically—not just for

dialogue, but as a platform for planning joint actions, including field visits, and fostering more concrete coordination.



The report notes that the PBC struggles to transition from convening dialogues to shaping operational frameworks and ensuring sustained follow-through at the country level.

The PBC must build on its past successes, particularly instances where it moved beyond theoretical debates to mobilise practical support for countries that requested it. Tracking commitments and recommendations from each meeting—and ensuring they are honoured—is crucial

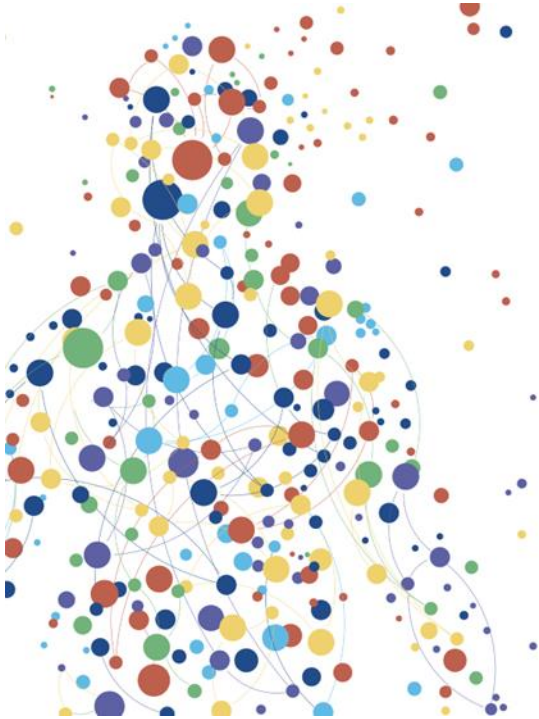
The report offers a series of recommendations for consideration in the PBAR which include: .

- *Expanding expert-level engagements and strengthening collaboration with academic institutions can further enhance the depth and credibility of PBC contributions.*
- *Funding for peacebuilding remains a key challenges and UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has called for a “Quantum leap” to \$500 million a year for the Peacebuilding Fund.*
- *More frequent and well-supported meetings and visits would increase the likelihood of mobilising PBC members to notify their capitals and relevant embassies about key outcomes and necessary follow-up actions.*

The consultations and discussions at the PBC aim to produce agreed recommendations for

consideration and decision by the General Assembly and the Security Council later this year.

The report concludes: “the world is changing, and so must its approach to sustaining peace. The rising tide of conflict and instability demands more than statements of intent; it requires bold commitments, predictable financing, and partnerships that extend beyond crises.”



## Global Solidarity Report 2024

*overcoming division in a multipolar world*

**The Global Solidarity Report** creates an annual global solidarity score using 11 indicators including unique public opinion polling alongside a range of official data on CO2 emissions, conflict deaths, trade, vaccines and more. The Report is an initiative that brings together experts from a variety of disciplines, experiences and geographies.

The 2024 Report concludes with ‘what we know about building solidarity.’

### **First, we need to win the messaging war**

As internationalists, we need to raise our game, escape issue-based siloes and build an overarching campaign for solidarity. We should recognise the interconnectedness of all global issues and the common challenges that imply the interdependence of all countries. In place of fear of disaster, this campaign must instead inspire hope and turn the rising tide of despair.

### **Second, we need to transform global public investment**

If we can channel the existing political will, we can help deliver better and more international finance to produce results now while beginning to restore faith in the benefits of a united world. We call for the implementation of a global minimum wealth tax that will capitalise on the considerable momentum towards taxing billionaires. And we call for the replenishment of major global funds. To create a more equitable basis for raising money, each country’s fair share contribution to multilateral funding could be calculated as a proportion of billionaire wealth.

## **AUSTRALIAN PEACE AND SECURITY FORUM**

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