

# *Stayin' Alive*

**Human security in an age of uncertainty**



**AUSTRALIAN PEACE AND SECURITY FORUM**

Working towards comprehensive national peace and security

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Human security in an age of uncertainty

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## Australian Peace and Security Forum

Working towards comprehensive national peace and security

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

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September 2025

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## Contributors



**Dr Julie Macken** has worked as a senior writer with The Australian Financial Review, a political consultant to both Federal Labor and the NSW Greens, held senior positions with Greenpeace, ActionAid and has recently graduated with a doctorate that examined the reasons behind Australia's abuse and occasional torture of asylum seekers.

Her recent book, *Australia's schism in the soul: colonisation, asylum seekers and a nation's failure to mourn*, tracks the psychological devolution of White Australia since colonisation – a state she describes as paranoid/ schizoid, melancholic. She argues both peace and

democracy demand a relationship with reality that the relaxed and comfortable Australia has forgone.



**Dr Ben Spies-Butcher** teaches Economy and Society in the Macquarie School of Social Sciences. He is Deputy Director of the [Macquarie University Housing and Urban Research Centre](#) and co-director of the [Australian Basic Income Lab](#), a collaboration between the Macquarie School of Social Sciences, the School of Social and Political Science at Sydney University and the Crawford School at ANU.

Ben completed his PhD in Economics at the University of Sydney while working in the non-government sector on issues of human rights. His

research focuses on the political economy of social policy and the welfare state, particularly how economic and political change shape social policy and housing finance. Ben is an Area Editor for the [Economic and Labour Relations Review](#), on the editorial collective for the [Journal of Australian Political Economy](#). Ben's most recent, forthcoming book is [Politics, Inequality and the Australian Welfare State After Liberalisation](#) with Anthem Press.



**Dr Michael Walker** is a Social Justice Facilitator in the Justice and Peace Office of the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney, after previously working for almost two decades in the union movement. Michael also teaches the unit Justice and Change in a Global World at Australian Catholic University. He is a founding Board Member of the Australian Peace and Security Forum and Co-chair of the Sydney Alliance Council.



**Dr Sue Wareham OAM** is President of the Medical Association for Prevention of War (Australia). She has spoken and written widely on matters related to peace and disarmament since the early 1980s. The need for total nuclear disarmament was her initial motivation and this remains a key focus. However she also addresses the human, environmental, climate, economic and many other costs of warfare, and ways Australia could prioritise peace instead.

Sue has been on the board in Australia of ICAN (the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons) which was awarded the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize, and of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War which was awarded the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize. She is currently also the secretary of Australians for War Powers Reform, whose goal is to bring democracy to the way in which a decision to send the ADF to overseas wars can be made.

Sue worked in general practice in Canberra for over three and a half decades.



**Dr Ludmilla Kwitko** is Associate Professor (Honorary) at the Gender Institute at the Australian National University, and Asia-Pacific Regional Representative on the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) International Board. She has extensive experience working as a practitioner, policy analyst and researcher in advancing the women, peace and security agenda with domestic and international partners, including previously as Gender and Community Development Adviser to AusAID; on the first NATO Civil Society Advisory Panel on WPS; and as WPS Coalition civil society representative to the Australian

Government's Inter-Departmental Committee on the First National Action Plan on WPS. Ludmilla serves as Co-Chair on the Steering Committee of the Australian Civil Society Coalition on WPS. She has a PhD in Sociology and Masters Degrees in Urban-Regional Planning and Sociology.

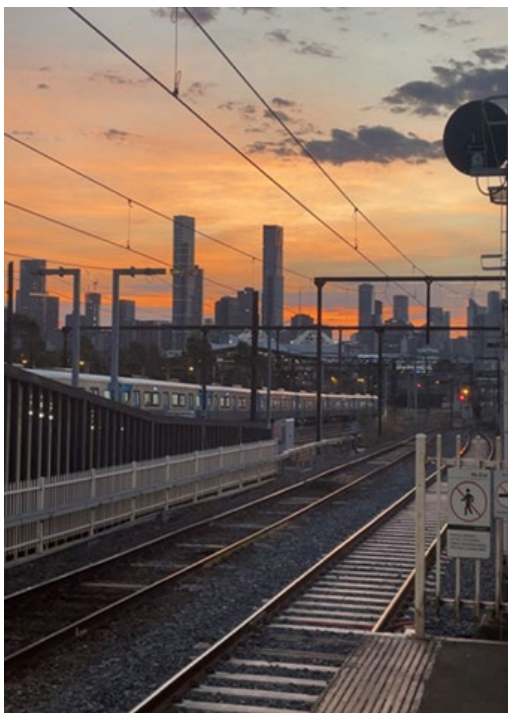


**Dr Donna Weeks** is Emeritus Professor at Musashino University in Tokyo. She held the position of Director (Dean) of International Relations for six years and was Chair of the Department of Political Science from April 2019 to March 2022. A specialist in Japanese politics and Japan-Australia relations, her teaching and research interests include political philosophy and peace studies. Donna's position at Musashino University was preceded by several decades teaching politics and international security at universities in southeast Queensland, following a role as Project Officer in the Australia-Japan Secretariat, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. She currently divides her time between Brisbane and Tokyo, now actively engaged in peace organisations, and bringing several research projects to fruition.

## Introduction

Australia is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, yet inequalities across wealth, housing, health and education have worsened over the past two decades. More than three million Australians live below the poverty line. There is a significant housing crisis for all ages, and young Australians are finding it increasingly difficult to enter the housing market. The rise of the 'sovereign citizen' movement, and incidents of religious and racial intolerance, highlight the reality that national cohesion and security start at home.

Despite nearly 20 years of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continues to lag behind other Australians, with only four of the 19 targets currently on track. These are complex issues with no simple solutions. But overcoming Indigenous socio-economic disadvantage is a critical element in ensuring peace and security for all Australians.



In launching the 2003 Commission for Human Security (2003), Professors Ogata Sadako and Amartya Sen noted that 'human security' centres on people, not the state and that

*'Human security complements state security, enhances human rights and strengthens human development. It seeks to protect people against a broad range of threats to individuals and communities and, further, to empower them to act on their own behalf.'*

Prioritising human security is a cornerstone for a national peace and security strategy. Human security is integral to ensuring peace and security in Australia but is seldom acknowledged in government security circles. By addressing the needs and vulnerabilities of individuals and communities, Australia can enhance resilience and stability, thereby reducing the likelihood of tension, crises and conflict.

The Australian Peace and Security Forum calls for a comprehensive national peace and security strategy for Australia. In defining such a strategy, we need to be clear about what kind of Australia we want to live in, what counts as progress, and how we assess how well we're succeeding.

This exploration of Human Security begins with **Dr Julie Macken** discussing our nation's deep seated fears and shadows that lead us to inaction on critical human security issues. She reflects on how Australia's failure to mourn its violent colonial past has led to a **state of collective melancholia**, with the result that denial and psychological splitting (seeing things in black and white extremes) have prevented genuine reconciliation with First Nations peoples, led to appalling abuses of people seeking Australia's protection and severed our collective attachment to the vitality of reality.



In the 1970s through to mid-1990's, Australia was in the business of engaging with reality and its motherlode of grief and mourning for harm done in the nation's colonisation. But today the tendency is to deny the past. She suggests that the three most obvious areas of this denial can be seen in the nation's response to climate change, defence and our relationship with the US.

**Housing** is one of the most vital and ever-present forms of security (or insecurity) we experience, according to Dr **Ben Spies-Butcher**. In chapter 2, he outlines how shelter is a basic [human need](#). It is an acknowledged [human right](#). And it is increasingly understood as the cornerstone of our broader health and [wellbeing](#).

Dr Spies-Butcher suggests "Another way of thinking about the crisis is to remember it is about security. Rather than thinking primarily about price, we could think about the many ways we ensure people have a secure home, through renters' rights, social housing and protections for those with large debts and limited means. We need to slow the market too. But housing is a human right. Treating it as one could be very helpful," he concludes.

In chapter 3, Dr **Michael Walker** explores the implications of our **reliance on energy** which is central to human security. Without access to energy, communities become vulnerable to poor health, food and water insecurity, and climate extremes. Switching to renewable energy sources will significantly enhance human security with the added benefit that it can deliver control back to the level of households and local communities. Dr Walker points out how 'phasing out of fossil fuels will also remove a significant supply vulnerability and of course cease contributing to climate change, Australia's biggest security challenge in the years ahead.'

'Rather than being dependent on and anxious about polluting fossil fuels extracted in the Middle East and shipped here through the South China Sea, we can produce all our



energy from renewable sources, manage it at a local level, and source the raw materials from appropriately compensated traditional owners. This is a future where everyone can benefit and can enjoy greater energy and economic security than we do now', he concludes.

It goes without saying that peace is essential for human security and in Chapter 4, **Dr Sue Wareham** stresses the need to avoid war to protect the **health of Australians**. 'Wars destroy practically everything that's needed for a secure and sustainable present and future for all people' observes Sue. Wars destroy human health, both physical and psychological, often with life-long and intergenerational impacts; they destroy critical civilian infrastructure, homes, and livelihoods and have devastating impacts on children's health and development. Preparation for war diverts national priorities and critically needed financial resources from areas of human need, while creating fear of others, especially the "enemy", and destroy the global cooperation that's needed to address our common threats.

Ultimately, wars involving nuclear-armed nations risk nuclear war and thus threaten human civilisation as we know it. Warfare and the preparation for potential warfare

commonly take priority over action to prevent climate breakdown. Neither China nor any other nation poses a level of threat remotely similar to that caused by the ravages of a warming planet, observes Dr Wareham.

‘Why do 600 million women, or 15 % of women in the world live within 50 kilometres of armed conflict, more than double the levels in the 1990s’ asks **Dr Ludmila Kwitko** in her Chapter 5 review of the past 25 years of the **UN Women Peace and Security Agenda**. This year the international community has cause to reflect on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325, the first landmark Security Council resolution on Women, Peace and Security (WPS).

‘Women’s meaningful participation in peace processes—from negotiation and mediation to peacekeeping and reconstruction leads to more sustainable and inclusive peace, with consistently more durable peace agreements when women are involved. The inclusion of women fosters greater trust and legitimacy in peacebuilding, ensuring that half the population’s voices and experiences are heard. Ignoring women’s contributions undermines peace and security efforts, perpetuates gender inequality, and reinforces harmful stereotypes,’ observes Dr Kwitko.

#### **But what difference would it make if Australia gave higher priority to Human Security in its national policy agenda?**

In the final chapter, **Dr Donna Weeks** looks back over the **Australia-Japan relationship** and describes how it offers a valuable case study of how broader notions of ‘security’ can be interpreted, and acted on. “For while we might ask *how* can we do security differently in the 21st century, we need to also ask *why* we are not endeavouring to do so. What then might our alternatives be? What might a comprehensive human/being-focussed security look like?” asks Dr Weeks.

As we grapple with the urgency of contemporary international relations, we

need models of security that offer genuine alternatives. In terms of recent developments in the Australia-Japan relationship may hold some seeds to what it might be. “Imagine a courageous bilateral leadership, which offered reassurance that ‘home’ is a most powerful signal that builds a foundation, and we could start with this as our key building block of what it means to be secure, to be safe,” she writes.

“If we revisit the concept of human security, it is human first, then security; instead, we have those who would focus on ‘security’ at the expense of what it is to be ‘human’. We need to find ways to revert to putting ‘human’ first, in its broadest sense—people, planet, peace, prosperity and partnerships (the five principles of a human security-inspired sustainable development), concludes Dr Weeks.

When we ‘feel the city breakin’, and everybody shakin’ we need new pathways for ‘stayin’ alive.”

#### **Acknowledgements**

The Australian Peace and Security Forum aims to publish shortly the fourth in the ‘Peace and Security Quarterly Report’ series which will focus on economic security. We aim to release it in December. To join or learn more about our webinars and other activities, visit our [website here](#).

Two reports, ***Give Peace a Chance*** published in April 2025 and ***The Heat is On*** published in June 2025 are available for free download at [www.austpeaceandsecurityforum.org.au](http://www.austpeaceandsecurityforum.org.au)

Special thanks to our writers and thanks to Unsplash, US Navy, the United Nations, MSF Iraq, and the Japan-Guide for the use of photos. And thanks to the Bee Gees for the title!

Russell Rollason AM (Editor)



## Time to say 'bye to our imaginary friends

Julie Macken



Australia has no national security plan. None. At a time of escalating conflicts, external and internal risks, both major political parties have failed to produce a comprehensive plan for the nation's security. In an historic moment rich in conflict, competition and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, robotics and surveillance tools, not to mention climate impacts, it is either grossly incompetent, or a denial of reality that allows any government to refuse the primary task of government. That is the safety and protection of the people.

I argue it is not gross incompetence – although there are some standout ministers who are indeed incompetent – but rather a denial of reality that has left the safety of the nation and her people swinging in the breeze. I conclude by briefly outlining what a national security plan would look like if we were to take reality seriously.

In my book, *Australia's schism in the soul: colonisation, asylum seekers and a nation's refusal to mourn*, (2025) I begin by outlining how Australia's failure to mourn its violent colonial past has led to a state of collective melancholia, with the result that denial and psychological splitting have prevented

genuine reconciliation with First Nations peoples, led to appalling abuses of people seeking Australia's protection and severed our collective attachment to the vitality of reality.

This melancholia is a psychologically immature state of mind characterised by its inability to deal with complexity and an inability to rightly perceive reality because it is not in contact with it. Freud referred to it as having a shallow, lifeless, thin attachment to reality and to be narcissistic in nature. This denial of reality infects most critical areas of national life, including national security.

In the same way an individual's mental health can be understood by what they do and don't do, say and don't say, a nation can also be read as a psychological subject, albeit of a different order. Likewise, a nation is not only capable of becoming psychologically unwell, but also of becoming psychologically well through its willingness to face reality.

We have previously been a nation alive with powerful, erotic energy – in the Freudian sense of the word – when we were collectively in the business of coming to terms with the truth of our foundational violence and the devastating impacts of

colonisation. From Whitlam through to mid-1990's Australia was in the business of engaging with reality and its motherlode of grief and mourning for harm done in the nation's colonisation. Perhaps the hightide mark of such truth and grounded-ness can be seen in former Prime Minister, Paul Keating's, Redfern speech. This is a speech that offers an extraordinary example of what American philosopher, Judith Butler, referred to as the public performance of mourning. Unlike melancholy, mourning has its roots buried deep in reality and so remains a thing alive with energy and love and imagination.

That is not what is going on for Australia today.

The three most obvious areas of this denial can be seen in the nation's response to climate change, defence and our relationship with the US.

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*described as “dire”,  
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confronting”*

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### **Carbon bombs and the climate crisis**

Climate disruption is a more accurate term, than climate change, for what Australia is already experiencing. This term better reflects the cascading crisis that we have witnessed In Australia is the last six years alone. The 2019 fires that consumed so many communities across the east coast were followed by devastating floods across the norther rivers of NSW. These floods created internally displaced communities, many of whom remain displaced three years later. Likewise, the floods that swept through Queensland, the drought that grips South Australia and the devastating blue-green algal infestation South Australia is dealing with as an "unprecedented" environmental disaster, are all evidence of a

heating atmosphere that is guaranteed to get worse.

This should come as no surprise given the [Sixth Assessment Report of the IPCC](#) revealed Australia was already experiencing an increase in heat extremes with major impacts on natural systems, with some “experiencing or at risk of irreversible change.” More recently reports emerged that the much-anticipated *National Climate Risk Assessment* include scenarios described as “dire”, “diabolical” and “extremely confronting”.

Here again, there is evidence of political immaturity at play as the government has yet to make its findings public. According to one source who has read excerpts of the report, the reason for this lack of transparency is that the findings are so alarming the government cannot make them public without having a comprehensive plan to deal with these threats. To date such a plan does not exist.

The federal government's denial is not only revealed by the refusal to make the report public – something that remains critical if the nation has any hope of managing these impacts – but by the approval of 30 new coal and gas mines in their first term of government and the decision to [approve a 40-year life extension for one of Australia's biggest fossil fuel developments](#) – Woodside Energy's North West Shelf gas (LNG) processing facility in the Pilbara. The cognitive dissonance between the apparent concern to cut carbon emissions and approval of these [carbon bombs](#) can only be understood as a denial of reality and science.

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*nothing so illuminates the  
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these two subjects.*

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## Defence and the US alliance

It is no longer possible to talk meaningfully of Australia's defence plans without also discussing the Australian/US alliance as they are increasingly linked. And nothing so illuminates the nation's denial of reality as these two subjects.

According to this [report](#), over the next four years, the Aukus submarine program is projected to cost \$17.3 billion, outstripping the RAAF's capital budget of \$12.7 billion, which excludes staff and sustainment costs. This is long before a submarine is expected to materialise. So as the prospect of Aukus twists the defence budget beyond recognition, it is not clear that any submarines will eventuate.



Over twelve months ago on 12 June 2024, the US Congressional Research Document service produced a research and advice document called the Navy Virginia-Class Submarine Program and AUKUS Submarine (Pillar 1) Project: Background and Issues for Congress. The document points out the AUKUS deal was a three-step process. The first was to establish a US-UK rotational submarine force in Western Australia. The second was that the US would sell us three or five Virginia nuclear powered submarines and the third would be that the UK assists us in building our own AUKUS class nuclear submarines.

But the [Congressional report](#) outlines when comparing the “potential benefits, costs, and risks” of the three stage plan, it might just be better for the US to operate more of its own boats out of WA. That is, “procuring

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*Aukus is like Australia's imaginary friend; not real but offering comfort in times of anxiety.*

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up to eight additional Virginia-class SSNs that would be retained in US Navy service and operated out of Australia along with the US and UK SSNs”.

That's right, why bother with the whole step two and three when the US is best served by simply operating its nuclear-powered attack submarines out of WA? Nevertheless, undeterred by these musings within the Congressional report, Australia continues to act as if the submarines will appear on time and on budget. And fails to develop a Plan B, let alone Plan C when it comes to defending the nation from military attack. Aukus is like Australia's imaginary friend; not real but offering comfort in times of anxiety.

Meanwhile, the central question of hitching such a substantial part of the defence budget to the Trump administration is left to various journalists to consider. As Crikey's Bernard Keane has done [here](#) in this imaginative exercise as he asks to consider the following.

*A major power launches an assault on Australia or Australian interests that we are ill-matched to contest, makes major gains against us and demands still more. The response of the United States, which has previously committed to providing us with assistance, is to welcome the leader of the power assaulting us — a demonstrated war criminal — and purport to discuss a deal that involves Australia sacrificing crucial interests with no input from us. When no deal is forthcoming, the US reverts the terms of negotiation in our assailant's favour — all cheered on by a phalanx of*

*commentators who regard our assailant as an example of the kind of muscular autocracy that the West could do with more of.*

He is describing the situation the Ukraine finds itself in with the Trump administration.

The reality is the Trump administration is not a reliable partner, the treatment of Ukraine by the US is a clear example of what other allies can expect from the Trump White House. Further the US has also telegraphed that Australia needs to adopt a publicly belligerent attitude toward China to increase the chance of the Aukus submarines ever arriving.

Naval operations expert Bryan Clark, a senior fellow at the conservative Hudson Institute with close links to the administration, explained to the SMH recently, the current US AUKUS review was about putting Australia on notice that the US expected Australia to use the submarines it bought.

“The Australians have been a little reticent to explicitly call out that they might use them against China,” he told this masthead. “If you’re not willing to say it in public, then you’re not going to put the Chinese on notice. It has been privately conveyed in the past, but the US would like Australia to make it more public.”

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*taking a meaningful step out of the melancholic psychoanalytic landscape we currently inhabit into the life-fullness of reality.*

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## **What would a national security plan look like?**

Imagine if we all collectively considered how to keep the nation and its country safe. Safe from destructive climate impacts, from disease and pandemics, from eco-collapse, from cyber warfare, from military attack, critical supply chain disruptions, and from social disorder. How would such a plan be created?

Given that such a plan requires a multidisciplinary approach with expertise ranging from climate science to epidemiologist, to military strategists, sociologists, economists, and all the front-line service such as State Emergency Services, Rural Fire Service, for starters, such an approach would need to be inclusive. It would need to have the buy-in that comes when organisations are consulted, educated and given voice. It would need to be a national process with room and time for contested ideas and dispute resolution. It would need a budget; it would need transparency.

It would need to be grounded in the reality of this historic moment we all inhabit. This is why only a people’s inquiry into national security fits the bill. Such an inquiry may have the additional benefit of dragging the nation a little closer to the reality of this moment and so taking a meaningful step out of the melancholic psychoanalytic landscape we currently inhabit into the life-fullness of reality.





Housing is one of the most vital and ever-present forms of security (or insecurity) we experience. Shelter is a basic [human need](#). It is an acknowledged [human right](#). And it is increasingly understood as the cornerstone of our broader health and [wellbeing](#).

Housing is also an old concern. The problems of homelessness and over crowded, poor quality housing dominated debates over the ‘social question’ through the initial waves of industrialisation. During the twentieth century, especially after the Second World War, acute housing needs declined (at least for white families). After Australia experienced the longest period of sustained economic growth of any rich country, this old problem has returned.



I find this historical context helpful. There is something deeply puzzling about our current situation. Census data reveals [homelessness rising](#). Millions report feeling housing stress. Yet, compared to earlier decades we live amongst material abundance. There are far more houses per person now than in 1950. The problem we face today is not the one faced by Swedish social democrats in the 1930s when they pledged to build a million homes.

It is also useful to frame this question as one of security. Homelessness is of course an extreme form of insecurity. But there are others. Private renters afraid to ask for something to be fixed in case their rent goes up or they get [evicted](#) ; Public renters who ask, but never receive, repairs, and can’t [afford to leave](#) ; Recent home buyers and low [income earners](#) with large debts who stop going out, paying bills and even eating regular meals rather than missing a mortgage payment. All these people are also housing insecure. And we know that in each case, their numbers have been rising. There is something terrifying about not having a secure home that drives us to live in these circumstances.

Many of these forms of insecurity are directly tied to price. High house prices drive high mortgages. High rents make it hard to leave, reducing the bargaining power of tenants. But thinking of housing only in economic terms, as a question of price and affordability, can also obscure as much as it reveals.

### **A Right to housing**

The most profound insecurities are tied to the rights we have to live in our homes. Australia does not recognise a general [right to housing](#). Instead, we have chosen to allocate housing in a market. Just like chocolate bars and Ferraris. And unlike healthcare. Where health is also a market, such as the US, it also dominates the economy and wealth creation, and also leaves many without the [healthcare they need](#).

There are two main limits to housing rights that create insecurity. The first is private rental. Australia's private rental market is not designed for security. In fact, it evolved precisely because few people expected to stay in it for very long. From the 1950s Australia embraced a model of home ownership.



All levels of government worked together to support families to buy their own home. This was no 'free' market. Governments built homes and sold them directly to first home buyers. Public housing was accessible to working families and designed to help them save a deposit. Home buyers had preferential access to credit. Even wage decisions were explicitly tied to the need to service a [mortgage](#).

It was still hard to buy a house. It took most of your working life. And it shaped people's other choices. Home ownership and even public housing were only really available to traditional families, whose breadwinner could earn good money. Single parents and Indigenous Australians were explicitly excluded.

But most people did end up owning, including most low wage workers. In the 1980s, around 70% of people had bought a home by their [mid-30s](#). Few people stayed in the private rental market for long, and those that did had little political or economic power. Australia's political and policy system responded. Rental protections that had been won in earlier decades, when most workers were renters and housing was a top working class priority, were gradually wound back. Landlords could evict renters with little notice or reason, and raise the rent in much the same way.

Private rental is insecure, at least in part, because the laws that govern it explicitly create it as insecure. This insecurity pervades the whole housing system. But for the vast majority of people, we can't simply buy a house. Instead, our only route to the security of home ownership is another form of insecure tenure – the mortgage.

### **The Mortgage**

Mortgages evolved as a way of expanding access to home ownership, precisely because most workers could not save the



substantial sum needed to purchase a home. Where governments wanted to promote home ownership (especially ownership rather than secure rental) they actively supported and expanded mortgage markets. Fanny Mae and Freddie Mac – the two mortgage schemes in the US caught up in the financial crisis – were partly designed to help low-income workers and communities of colour into [home ownership](#).

Mortgages can expand access, but they are not entirely secure. Banks are reluctant to lend without security. Mortgages provide funds to buy a house in return for giving up genuine security of tenure until the mortgage is fully acquitted. The threat of losing your home, especially when the private rental market is so insecure, keeps people 'on payment'. Banks have developed their own measures to estimate how likely people are to miss a mortgage payment. Using their own repayment data, their index – called Household Expenditure Measure (HEM) - estimates how much money a household will subsist on while staying on payment. In many cases, the HEM index is lower than the [Henderson Poverty Line](#). People will literally place themselves in poverty to avoid losing their home.

These two forms of insecurity feed off each other. If private rental is expensive and insecure, then people will do a lot to leave it. Every time it looks like house prices might falter – as they did with the [financial crisis in 2008](#) and the pandemic in 2020 – [investors](#) begin to leave and then first home buyers storm in. Investors might be worried about returns. First home buyers just want a secure home and will pay ridiculous sums to get one.

Rental rights can vary considerably. If renting is secure and affordable – as it is in many European countries where social housing is the dominant form of rental and

tenant rights are much stronger – many choose lifelong rental.

Mortgages have also changed over time alongside changes to our financial system that have transformed the role of debt. Financial deregulation has made it easier to access debt, and much more profitable. Buying an asset with debt allows you to make considerable sums off small capital gains.

There aren't many sectors where ordinary people can borrow hundreds of thousands of dollars to buy assets (at least not without very high interest). In the asset-debt economy, mortgages make housing unique.



As credit has become easier to access, it has driven up house prices. Those outside the market bid against each other to access secure home ownership, and the more they can borrow, the more they can pay. As prices go up, housing becomes a better and better investment – not to rent out, but to speculate over. Rather than dampen investor demand, governments instead to encourage speculation by reducing taxes for housing investors (through negative gearing and capital gains tax concessions).

For a couple of decades now, home ownership has fallen as a proportion of households. Adding more houses simply added [more investors](#).

There is some good news. The housing crisis is now so profound, people are demanding action. Many states have begun to strengthen [rental laws](#). There are new commitments to expand [social housing](#). Financial rules (called prudential regulation) have been tightened for [investors](#). But these are small steps and far short of a real solution to housing insecurity.

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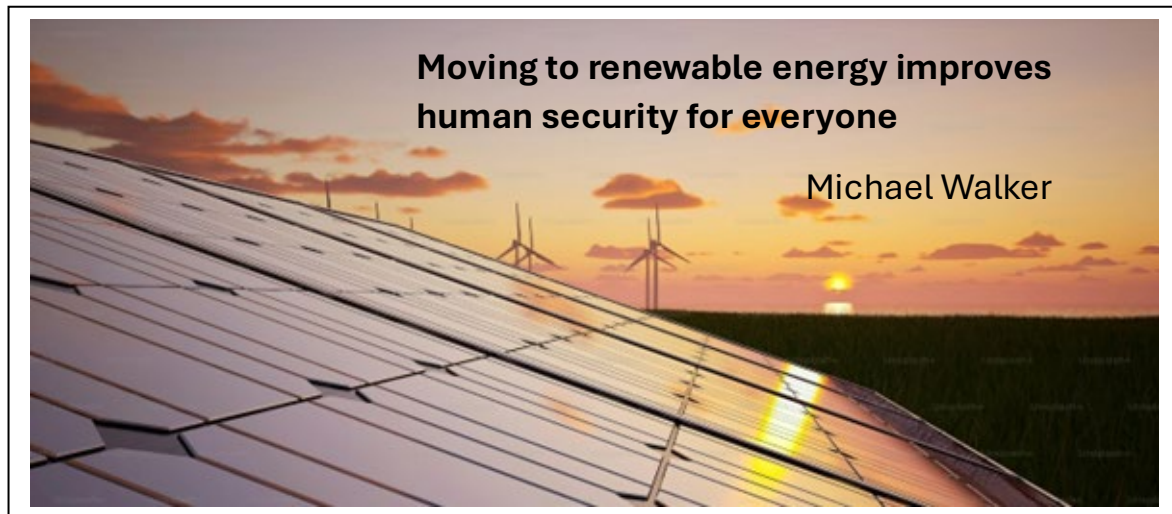
*But housing is a human right.  
Treating it as one could be very  
helpful.*

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We now face a new problem, one that stems from treating housing as an asset category rather than a human right. Most voters still own a home. Many have large debts and would be bankrupted if prices fell. If prices fall, new construction also falls, making many blue collar workers unemployed and slowing the economy. Governments might say they want a solution, but they don't really want prices to fall.

Another way of thinking about the crisis is to remember it is about security. Rather than thinking primarily about price, we could think about the many ways we ensure people have a secure home. Through renters rights, social housing and protections for those with large debts and limited means. We need to slow the market too. But housing is a human right. Treating it as one could be very helpful.





From growing our food to transportation, communication, and healthcare, access to energy is a necessity for the basics of life. Our reliance on energy is central to human security. Without access to energy, communities become vulnerable to poor health, food and water insecurity, and climate extremes. Switching to renewable energy sources will significantly enhance human security with the added benefit that it can deliver control back to the level of households and local communities. Phasing out of fossil fuels will also remove a significant supply vulnerability and of course cease contributing to climate change, Australia's biggest security challenge in the years ahead.

### Europe's brutal lesson after Ukraine

Fossil fuel dependency creates security vulnerabilities, possibly the biggest of which is supply vulnerability.

Europe discovered this after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Europeans' dependence on imported natural gas caused a spike in fossil fuel prices after supplies had to be found from alternative sources. One 2023 study estimates the additional cost to Europeans in the first year of the conflict alone - absorbed through higher energy bills and through publicly

funded fuel subsidies - was more than €643 billion<sup>i</sup>. The figure below illustrates the implied impact of the war on Europe's energy costs.

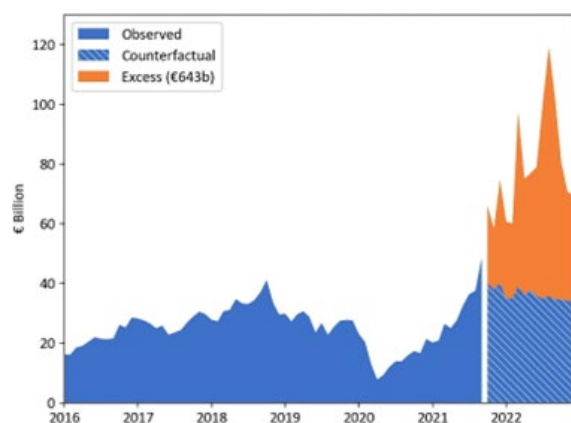


Figure 1 From Colgan J, Gard-Murray A, Hinthorn M (2023) Quantifying the value of energy security: How Russia's invasion of Ukraine exploded Europe's fossil fuel costs, *Energy Research & Social Science*, 103, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S221462962300261X>

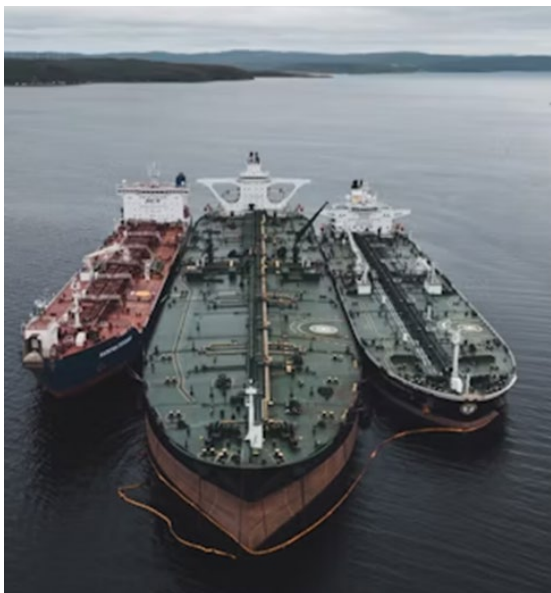
The one upside of the spike in fossil fuel prices is that it fostered rapid clean energy expansion, with non-fossil fuels accounting for 71% of electricity generation in Europe by 2024 (47% from renewables and 24% from nuclear)<sup>ii</sup>.

### Australia's similar conundrum on imports

From a simple supply-line point of view, Australia's fossil fuel dependence is a genuine concern. The country is heavily dependent on imported fossil fuels and **91%** of oil is imported from the Asia Pacific region, with South Korea and Singapore being major sources <sup>iii</sup>. Gas is also primarily imported, due the bizarrely inefficient arrangement where the country's domestic supply is set aside for export markets.

Protection of shipping lanes from the Middle East has been one of the anxieties behind Australia's participation in numerous overseas wars: most recently the two Iraq Wars but stretching back as long ago as the First World War when the British Empire was dependent on Middle East oil to power its Navy.

Nowadays we don't refine oil ourselves, we receive it via East and Southeast Asia, so it flows through or near the South China Sea; hence one of the official justifications of the AUKUS deal under which Australia commits itself to astronomical military spending to maintain freedom of shipping to our North <sup>iv</sup>.



Just imagine the alternative: If we transition to an economy in which energy generation and transportation are powered by renewable energy, we no longer have a

critical interest in preserving the flow of oil and gas over those waterways<sup>v</sup>. The risk to which we are currently exposed vanishes and there is no longer any official reason to spend \$400 billion on long-range submarines. The country can put that money to better use in ways that improve the lives of the citizenry.

### Flow-on benefits of electrifying transportation

What happens if we remove our dependency not just on coal and gas as energy sources but oil as well? When we electrify not just power generation for households and businesses but for transportation as well? The grid is gradually moving to being powered mainly by rooftop solar, large-scale solar and wind, with batteries and pumped hydro storage of excess power produced during the day and used in the evening. Transportation power that is drawn from the grid is, increasingly, coming from renewable sources rather than coal.

It gets better: that same transportation power can also be sent *back* into the grid. Electric vehicles are, themselves, large domestic batteries on wheels, so every new EV can potentially accelerate the move towards additional battery storage. The Government set the regulations for vehicle-to-home (V2H) and vehicle-to-grid (V2G) power standards in 2024<sup>vi</sup> and vehicle manufacturers are anticipated to start adding this feature by 2026. It means that EVs can draw power out when they need it and send power either to the house or to the grid when they are parked in the garage at night, much like a combined rooftop solar with battery household system.

Many EVs on the road now are technically capable of this feat already, the manufacturers simply haven't enabled it. Polestar has announced it will add V2G capability in late 2025, incentivising other manufacturers to follow suit.



## Removing the risk of large single points of failure

Solar, wind and batteries spread out power generation, so that there aren't a few large points of failure as we are being reminded all the time with unplanned shutdowns of ageing fossil-fuel based infrastructure. In the state of New South Wales, most power comes from just four power stations (all of them coal-fired): Eraring, Vales Point, Bayswater and Mount Piper. As the Japanese discovered after Fukushima in 2011, power stations are also vulnerable to external natural disasters.



Rooftop solar, household and community batteries and potentially even V2G-enabled vehicles democratise energy and give control over energy generation back to households and communities, at a level where people can get involved in its management. Electrified households with solar can be self-sufficient with respect to energy, with the ability to ride out power outages and completely liberated from fuel supply issues. An electric vehicle's battery alone can power a house for two days.

A more stable energy grid, where fluctuations in power needs can be met simply by redistributing it from small-scale sources, does not even require 100% conversion to electric; only a few hundred

thousand V2G-enabled electric vehicles would make a significant impact and three million V2G-enabled vehicles (equal to 15% of all cars currently on the road) would be capable of providing as much power as all of Australia's remaining coal stations<sup>vii</sup> over short periods.

## Reducing shipping-related emissions

The huge CO2 footprint of global shipping is another problem that keeps renewable energy proponents up at night.

The simplest way to reduce shipping emissions is to reduce the amount of bulk shipping. It turns out that the easiest way to do that is to stop transporting fossil fuels around the world. Transport of coal, oil and gas between countries accounts for **40%** of all bulk shipping worldwide<sup>viii</sup>. Eliminating these fuels from our energy ecosystem not only eliminates the emissions caused by the burning of the transported fuel, it would also additionally reduce sea transport related emissions by nearly half.

Think that's impossible? In China, new energy vehicles now make up more than half of new vehicle sales. China is likely to hit peak oil very soon and then start reducing consumption. National People's Congress deputy Liu Hanyuan predicts the country will cease importing crude oil altogether around 2040<sup>ix</sup> - just fifteen years from now (they still anticipate retaining some domestic production which will be enough to meet ongoing needs).

For smaller watercraft, electrifying is clearly a workable option. A company in Tasmania has changed the narrative on electric water vessels, recently launching the world's biggest battery-powered ship: a ferry over 130 metres long<sup>x</sup>.

## Resource justice

Finally, renewable transition creates a unique possibility to redress the historic inequity of resource extraction. Mining

leases have been granted over historically appropriated lands, usually without any form of royalty. A 2024 study<sup>xi</sup> found that more than half of Australia's critical minerals including lithium and cobalt lie within formally recognised indigenous land. If you include lands that are subject to native title claims that aren't yet determined, that figure rises to 80%. Granting mining licenses to non-indigenous companies and ignoring traditional owners will no longer fly. The Government and its First Nations Clean Energy and Climate Change Advisory Committee have codesigned a strategy to promote indigenous ownership and economic development in the development of renewable energy industries, improving the security of indigenous communities too<sup>xii</sup>.

This has been a runaway success in Canada, where the statistics are striking:

- 22% of Canadian energy projects are wholly indigenous-owned and a further 40% are majority indigenous owned<sup>xiii</sup>, and

- 20% of First Nations Canadians have ownership and/or equity in renewable energy initiatives<sup>xiv</sup>

A similar change here would transform the narrative around Indigenous Australians forever.

## Conclusion

The renewable transition has unexpectedly provided us a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to transform the economic security both of the whole country, and of Indigenous Australians too. Rather than being dependent on and anxious about polluting fossil fuels extracted in the Middle East and shipped here through the South China Sea, we can produce all our energy from renewable sources, manage it at a local level, and source the raw materials from appropriately compensated traditional owners. This is a future where everyone can benefit and can enjoy greater energy and economic security than we do now.

*Thank you to Laura Riggs from Australian Catholic University who provided research assistance on this paper.*

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<sup>iv</sup> Galloway A (2023) New submarines will deter blockades that cut us off from the world: Marles, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 March 2023, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/new-submarines-will-deter-blockades-that-cut-us-off-from-the-world-marles-20230316-p5css4.html>

<sup>v</sup> Oloruntoba R, Kam B, Nguyen H, Warren M, Chhetri P, Thai V (2022) Conflict in the South China Sea threatens 90% of Australia's fuel imports: study, *The Conversation*, 22 August 2022, <https://theconversation.com/conflict-in-the-south-china-sea-threatens-90-of-australias-fuel-imports-study-188148>

<sup>vi</sup> Purtill J (2024) V2G, which can turn EVs into giant home batteries, is coming to some cars in 2025, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 15 November 2024, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2024-11-15/vehicle-to-grid-v2g-electric-vehicle-technology-soon-here/104498552>

<sup>vii</sup> Brakels R (2023) 3 Million EVs, 22.46 Gigawatts: A Sober Look at Australia's V2G Future, *Solarquotes Blog*, 11 August 2023, <https://www.solarquotes.com.au/blog/australias-v2g-future/>

<sup>viii</sup> Barnard M (2023) How Will Climate Action Change The Face Of Global Shipping? *Forbes*, 5 December 2023, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelbarnard/>



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[2023/12/05/how-will-climate-action-change-the-face-of-global-shipping/](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214629624001476)

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<sup>x</sup> Oong S (2025) World's largest '100 per cent electric' ship launched by Tasmanian builder Incat, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2 May 2025, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-05-02/incat-launches-worlds-largest-battery-electric-ship-hull096/105243498>

<sup>xi</sup> Burton J, Kemp D, Barnes R, Parmenter J (2024) Mapping critical minerals projects and their intersection with Indigenous peoples' land rights in Australia, *Energy Research & Social Science*, 113,

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214629624001476>

<sup>xii</sup> Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (2024) The First Nations Clean Energy Strategy 2024 – 2030, [https://www.energy.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-12/First Nations Clean Energy Strategy.pdf](https://www.energy.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-12/First%20Nations%20Clean%20Energy%20Strategy.pdf)

<sup>xiii</sup> Carruthers A, McKlusky E, Bishop T (2025) *Indigenous Legal Matters Bulletin*, Fasken, 24 April 2025, <https://www.fasken.com/en/knowledge/2025/04/update-on-trends-in-indigenous-equity-investments-in-canada>

<sup>xiv</sup> Gall L, Henderson C, Morrison T (2022) Waves of Change: Indigenous clean energy leadership for Canada's clean, electric future, Climate Institute, February 2022, <https://climateinstitute.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/ICE-report-ENGLISH-FINAL.pdf>



The prevention of armed conflict and the promotion of health for all are inextricably linked, and they are the foundations for human security.

On World Health Day in 2022, WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus [stated](#) that “Peace underpins all that is good in our societies. We need peace for health and likewise health for peace”.

Wars affect not only health on a large scale, but practically everything that’s needed for a secure and sustainable present and future for all people.

They destroy human health, both physical and psychological, along with critical civilian infrastructure, homes, and livelihoods. The impacts are often life-long and intergenerational. [Children’s health and development](#) suffer severely. [Media freedoms](#) and [human rights](#) – which are also important for health – are undermined.

Wars and their preparation contribute to [climate change](#), in part by creating large quantities of greenhouse gasses – an estimated [5.5% of total global emissions](#) - and devastate [the environment](#) in other ways.

War propaganda ramps up [fear of others](#), especially the “enemy”, and undermines the global cooperation that’s needed to address our common threats.

Health inequities are an intrinsic part of modern warfare. Those who pay the price are most often the young and those remote from the centres of decision-making – and from [war profiteering](#). (The main profiteers are listed [here](#).) As The Nation magazine [reported](#) in June 2024, “when a bomb explodes, someone profits”.

In addition, military spending diverts scarce resources from development. In 2024, world military expenditure reached an unprecedented [\\$2718 billion](#), while the UN [states](#) that “hard-won development gains are being reversed, particularly in the poorest countries.” As just one example of Australia’s contribution to disproportionately high military spending, the extremely controversial AUKUS nuclear submarine program alone will cost hundreds of billions of dollars, while very modest aid and health programs flounder for lack of funds.

In September 2024 at the UN’s annual Peace Bell ceremony, UN Secretary-General António Guterres [warned](#) that war is spreading,

inequalities are growing, and new technologies are being weaponized without safeguards.

The most threatening of all technologies are nuclear weapons, the most destructive devices ever created. The risk of their use is assessed to be [greater](#) now than at any other time since 1945. Wars involving nuclear-armed nations destroy health even with so-called “conventional weapons”, but they also risk nuclear war and threaten human civilisation as we know it.

### **Australia’s role**

There are many things that Australia could do to better promote peace and security. Following is a short list of some of them. Civil society is playing a leading role in promoting many of these initiatives.

#### ***Sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons***

In 2018, ALP leader [Anthony Albanese](#) committed Labor to sign and ratify the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) when in government. We’re still waiting.

Australia in fact still provides a false legitimacy for these weapons of mass destruction by relying on US “[extended nuclear deterrence](#)”. In addition, our complicity with the US policy of “neither confirm nor deny” (the presence of nuclear weapons on US ships or aircraft) means that nuclear weapons-capable [US B-52 bombers](#) from the RAAF base at Tindal in the Northern Territory could launch nuclear war, with Australians not even knowing, let alone consenting.

As a “nuclear umbrella state”, signing the TPNW would be by far the greatest contribution Australia could make to creating a nuclear weapons free world. It’s time for our Prime Minister to sign.



### ***Abandon AUKUS***

While our government has commendably improved Australia’s relationship with China, the disastrous and eye-wateringly expensive AUKUS alliance ties us further to provocative and risky US military posturing towards China. It is leading us towards a catastrophic war, possibly a nuclear war.

A good starting point for Australia would be to declare that we will not join any US war against China, because China is not an enemy.

AUKUS should be abandoned, or at the very least this secretive agreement should be subject to a rigorous and transparent parliamentary inquiry into its costs and risks.

### ***Ramp up climate action, including on military emissions***

Climate change is widely recognised as a “[threat multiplier](#)” which intensifies instability and conflict. Rapid reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions is a critical human security measure, and must include reduction of the significant emissions produced by military activity (see [here](#) and [here](#)).

However, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) Future Energy Strategy states that the ADF’s transition to sustainable energy must be done “*without detriment to warfighting capability and interoperability*”. In other words, warfare takes priority over climate action. Neither China nor any other nation poses a level of

threat remotely similar to that caused by the ravages of a warming planet. Human security demands that climate action take priority over warfighting.



### ***Rein in the weapons industry***

Australia's [weapons exports](#) also are rapidly increasing. There is very little transparency around what we sell to whom; Quakers Australia are calling for accountability in our military trade.

Contrary to the notion that arms keep us all safe, Professor Alfred W. McCoy of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, [reminds us](#) that *"When nations prepare for war, they are far more likely to go to war"*.

In addition, weapons makers are intruding more and more into our [universities](#). There are extensive [collaborations](#) on weapons projects with the Australian government and industry. Seventy percent of Australian universities have received [funding from the US Defense Department](#), thus tying our places of higher learning towards aiding and abetting more US wars and away from peace.

A 2024 [Stimson Center report](#) also addresses the *"grave economic, strategic, and social implications of a military build-up"*. William Hartung [writes](#) of the *"moral dilemma"* facing graduating science and engineering students in the US *"about whether they want to put*

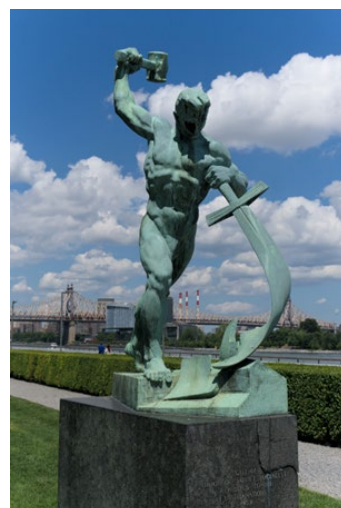
*their skills to work developing instruments of death"*. Australian students increasingly face the same dilemma.

The world's biggest weapons companies are [attracting young scientific minds](#) even at school level. For example, the [National Youth Science Forum \(NYSF\)](#) has as its principal sponsor Lockheed Martin, the world's biggest weapons company. Leading by example, the [Friends' School in North Hobart](#) recently notified the NYSF that it will no longer take part in its programs.

### ***Invest in peacebuilding***

While documents such as the 2024 Defence Strategic Review assure us that our nation's goal is to *"contribute to regional peace and security"*, there is no strategy for doing this, apart from relying on military strength and the theory of deterrence. There is no examination of whether this sole strategy - deterrence - works, and, if so, how often and to what extent. As noted above, there is evidence that it more often fails.

Notwithstanding the Albanese government's increase in funding for diplomacy, a peace-focussed strategy would invest far more in all the tools of peacebuilding, including also negotiation and mediation skills, and arms control and other measures in our region.





### ***Teach peace***

[Education](#) plays a critical role in promoting peace, which is recognised by the [Australian Education Union](#) and [others](#). However, [peace research](#) in our universities has been almost totally abandoned, with some notable but rare exceptions. Such neglect is like hoping for a healthy society while abandoning health research.

In addition, Australia's official war commemoration is sliding towards glorification of our wars. For the approximately 100,000 school students who visit the [Australian War Memorial](#) every year, the Memorial offers little encouragement of critical thinking about Australia's wars.



Failure to learn – and teach – the lessons of war and its avoidance is a betrayal of our obligation to our war dead, who died for a more peaceful future, not endless wars.

### ***Allow our parliamentarians to vote for peace***

The [current process](#) whereby a prime minister alone can send Australians to wars of choice overseas makes a choice for war far too easy

and potentially ill-advised. Australia has joined disastrous wars of choice in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq, at the behest of the US. Such a monumental decision as going to war - when Australia is not under attack - should be made only after exhaustive scrutiny and debate of the matter in our parliament, including an examination of the likely human and all other costs and who will bear the brunt. [Civil society](#) is leading the way on this too.

### ***Uphold the rule of law consistently, not selectively***

Australia's support for the rule of law varies markedly, depending on who is violating it. The most stark example in recent times has been in the wildly different responses by Prime Minister Albanese and Foreign Minister Wong to, on the one hand, Russian crimes in Ukraine, and on the other, Israeli crimes in Gaza. The blatant double standards displayed not only sow discontent and unrest at home but also distrust abroad of Australia's capacity to act impartially.

Civil society must continue to demand the protection of the rule of law for *all* people, and accountability for the most grievous violations, no matter whether it is friend or foe who commits them.

## Crucial role for women in peace and security

Ludmila Kwitko



2025 is a critical year to reflect on the state of peace and security, multilateralism, women's rights and human rights, as conflicts and crises persist across Gaza, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ukraine, Haiti and beyond; and where world leaders are spending record levels on militaries and weapons, which are contributing to growing numbers of armed conflicts around the world and leading to increased poverty, violation of human rights, forced displacement and ecological destruction.

It is also a critical year for the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, as we approach the 31<sup>st</sup> October and the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325, the first landmark Security Council resolution on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). It is time to reflect on the current status of the WPS agenda, challenges, new and emerging threats and priorities.

In a year of many anniversaries and commemorations: 80 years since the end of World War II; 80 years since the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki; 80 years since the establishment of the United Nations (UN); the 77<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UN peacekeeping; and 30 years since the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action<sup>i</sup> (to name but a few); it is time to learn from our collective histories.

Most importantly it is time for the global community - nation states, regional and multilateral bodies, private sector and civil society - to step up, take stronger action and to deliver on the repeatedly promised commitments to fully implement the WPS Agenda as key to addressing sustainable peace and security. At its very core WPS is about the diversity of women's experiences, human security and human rights, not about making conflict 'safer' for women. In 2025, the world needs more 'human security', with more women, peace and security NOT less.



Women's meaningful participation in peace processes—from negotiation and mediation to peacekeeping and reconstruction leads to more sustainable and inclusive peace, with consistently more durable peace agreements when women are involved. The inclusion of women fosters greater trust and legitimacy in peacebuilding, ensuring that half the population's voices and experiences are heard. Ignoring women's contributions undermines peace and security efforts, perpetuates gender inequality, and reinforces harmful stereotypes.<sup>ii</sup>

### The WPS Agenda

25 years ago the UN Security Council (SC) recognised women's crucial role in peace and security, by calling for increased participation of women in decision-making at all levels and emphasising and addressing women's unique experiences in conflict and post-conflict settings. It was an important recognition of the clear link between gender equality and the maintenance of international peace and security, contributing to shaping the normative framework of the global WPS agenda, and became one of the main thematic pillars of the SC's work; while at the same time also extending beyond the SC's work.

UNSCR 1325 is based on 4 fundamental pillars: prevention, participation, protection and relief and recovery. It reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of women's equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. It also calls on all parties to conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other

forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict.<sup>iii</sup>



Since 2000 there have been 9 additional SC resolutions related to WPS including:

- [Resolution 1820 \(2008\)](#) –recognising sexual violence as a tactic of war.
- [Resolution 2106 \(2013\)](#) – stressing accountability for perpetrators of sexual violence in conflict, as well as women's political and economic empowerment.
- [Resolution 2122 \(2013\)](#) – positioning gender equality and women's empowerment as critical to international peace and security; recognising the differential impact of all violations in conflict on women and girls; calling for consistent application of WPS across the SC's work.
- [Resolution 2493 \(2019\)](#) – calling for full implementation of all previous resolutions on WPS; requesting the UN to develop context-specific approaches for women's participation in all UN-supported peace processes; and urging Member States to ensure and provide timely support for the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in all stages of peace processes.<sup>iv</sup>

Since 2004, 114 governments have adopted WPS National Action Plans (NAPs) as a primary form of implementing UNSCR 1325. In addition, several regional plans have been adopted including the current [Association of Southeast Asian Nations](#)

([ASEAN](#)) Regional Action Plan (2022) and previously the Pacific Regional Action Plan (2012-2015) in the Asia and Pacific region.<sup>v</sup> Australia is on its Second WPS NAP (2021-2031) and has produced its First Progress Report.<sup>vi</sup> While 114 nations and multiple regions support plans for WPS, in contrast the United States has cancelled its Global Office on Women's Issues and WPS activities, with a message about 2021-2025 being archived content and redirection to the State Department.<sup>vii</sup>

In 2024, in the UN Pact for the Future governments pledged to take action to accelerate implementation of WPS commitments, recognising human rights, gender and the empowerment of women, with the aspiration that the Pact would “lay the foundations for a sustainable, just, and peaceful global order – for all peoples and nations.”<sup>viii</sup> This is a significant challenge for the UN, (and vulnerable communities across the world) as it faces a major period of downsizing in staff, resources, infrastructure and relocation across many of the key peace and security agencies, such as peace keeping, UN Women, UN Children's Fund, UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, World Food Program, to name but a few.

For women-led and women's rights organisations the financial situation with deep foreign aid cuts and continuing humanitarian crises is stark with expectations that almost 50% could be forced to shut down within 6 months if current conditions persist.<sup>ix</sup> This situation exists amid a rise in Conflict Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) cases with impacts disproportionately on women and girls, and with humanitarian organisations forced to do more and more with less and less. UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten in briefing the SC noted that global military spending in just 24 hours exceeds what is allocated in 1 year

to address CRSV and stressed that funding needs to rise, otherwise women's frontline organisations are going from 'underfunded to unfunded.'<sup>x</sup>



## Global Context

With all the support for WPS in the form of NAPs across the global community why do we now live in a context where - 600 million women, or 15 % of women in the world - live within 50 kilometers of armed conflict, more than double the levels in the 1990s<sup>xi</sup> and the 2025 Global Peace Index<sup>xii</sup> confirms that the world has become less peaceful over the last 17 years.

Military spending rose for the 10th successive year exceeding \$US2.7 trillion in 2024. Ecological disruption also continued, with 2024 being the first year on record in which the average global temperature was clearly more than 1.5°C above the pre-industrial average. New global security and political uncertainties arose in 2025 following US elections in late 2024, challenging global security assumptions and economic relationships. In addition, the world is entering a new and more dangerous nuclear age. The world's nuclear arsenals are being enlarged and upgraded, by nearly all of the 9 nuclear-armed states - US, Russia, UK, France, China, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel. Russia and the US together possess 90% of nuclear weapons.<sup>xiii</sup> At the same time the UN SC 5 permanent members: US, China, France, Russia, and UK, those who are tasked by the UN as the most powerful body to 'maintain

international peace and security’, and who have the right of veto - are also those same 5 leading in the upgrading of their nuclear weapons.

Over the last 5 years the UN Secretary General (SG) in his Annual WPS Reports has become more strident in his warnings about stagnation and regression on WPS indicators.

2022: *“So far, we are going backwards. Military spending is up, funding for women’s organisations and the percentage of women in peace negotiations are down, and violence against women human rights defenders is on the rise.”*

2023: *“Women continue to face entrenched barriers to direct participation in peace and political processes, and women’s organisations struggle to find resources, while military spending continues to grow every year.”*

*“A growing share of the world’s population lives under autocratic rule, after many years of democratic backsliding. Misogyny is a common thread in the rise of authoritarianism and in the spread of conflict and violent extremism. ... the world is undergoing the largest global food crisis in modern history. Much of this increase is driven by nearly 200 armed conflicts and situations of organized violence, as well as by the climate crisis and the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.”*

2024: *“One key factor undermining progress is the escalating backlash against women’s rights and gender equality.”*

*“I am deeply concerned by the insufficient progress on the WPS agenda in general ... five years remaining to implement the 2030 Agenda. ... frustration expressed by women peacebuilders is rooted in the disconnect*

*between the ambitious rhetoric and the modest reach of the proposed interventions.”<sup>xiv</sup>*

## **Political Will and Implementation For the Future**

Women’s human rights defenders have long argued that *“the fundamental premise of the WPS agenda is that relegating women - and their rights - to the margins of decision-making further entrenches women’s exclusion, and prolongs violence and this must change now.”<sup>xv</sup>*



On the eve of this 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UNSCR 1325 it is time to move beyond the rhetoric for WPS and to engage the political will for concrete actions for human rights, for the millions of women and girls in conflict zones, humanitarian crises and the millions of people forcibly displaced and stateless. The message is clear that the world needs more women, peace and security, not less.

Ideas for creative, innovative and urgent implementation for peace and security are also needed. Many of these have been canvassed for many years (including in the SG’s Annual WPS Reports), and include the following.<sup>xvi</sup>

- Prioritise human security, human rights and women’s rights for sustainable peace and security
- Prioritise conflict prevention over military response

- Reduce military spending and increase funding for women's peace building for sustainable peace and security
- Incorporate WPS principles and practice across all peace and security efforts
- Immediately increase women's participation in peace talks as delegates, negotiators, mediators, observers
- Finance women's participation in peace and security; including official development assistance
- Increase sustainable financing for women-led peace building and humanitarian efforts
- Strengthen intergenerational and inclusive collaboration and leadership to advance the WPS agenda
- Integrate WPS into new and emerging (emerged) areas such as climate, disaster risk reduction and response, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence
- Address the accountability of the Security Council, and specifically its members, including for their responsibility as stewards of WPS SCRs
- Use incentives, sanctions, international criminal proceedings, divestment campaigns to strengthen protection of women in conflict affected countries
- Stop impunity for sexual and gender base violence
- Ensure women's human rights defenders are safe, at home and in relocation
- Build quotas/ targets for women's equal participation in local/ national governments and parliaments

<sup>i</sup> [Fourth World Conference on Women](#) and adoption of the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action \(1995\)](#).

<sup>ii</sup> [Women, peace, and security | United Nations](#)

<sup>iii</sup> [Women, peace, and security | United Nations](#)

<sup>iv</sup> [Global norms and standards | What we do: Peace and security | UN Women – Headquarters](#)

<sup>v</sup> [Resources - WPS Focal Points Network](#)

<sup>vi</sup> [Australia's second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security \(2021-2031\); Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan 2021-2031 Progress Report. 2024](#)

<sup>vii</sup> [About Us - United States Department of State. 2025](#)

<sup>viii</sup> [Pact for the Future - United Nations Summit of the Future | United Nations](#)

<sup>ix</sup> [At a breaking point: The impact of foreign aid cuts on women's organizations in humanitarian crises worldwide | Publications | UN Women – Headquarters. 2025](#)

<sup>x</sup> [Security Council hears about rising conflict-related sexual violence amid falling resources | UN News. 19 August 2025](#)

<sup>xi</sup> [WPS-Index-executive-summary.pdf](#), p. 11

<sup>xii</sup> [GPI-2025-web.pdf](#)

<sup>xiii</sup> [SIPRI Yearbook 2025. Summary](#)

<sup>xiv</sup> UN SG WPS Annual Report. 2022 [S-2022-740.pdf](#) ; 2023 [S. 2023 725-EN \(1\).pdf](#); 2024 [S-2024-671.pdf](#)

<sup>xv</sup> [Statement by Ms. Hala Al Karib at the UN Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security - NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. 2023.](#)

<sup>xvi</sup> This is not an exhaustive list of suggestions.



## A human security framework for Japan-Australia relations

Donna Weeks



‘...those who still put their faith in power politics in the traditional sense of the term and, therefore, in war as the last resort of all foreign policy may well discover in a not too distant future that they have become masters in a rather useless and obsolete trade.’

Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, 1963

If we were to cast our eyes over the contemporary Australia-Japan relationship, we would see a shift to military cooperation and procurement that was unimaginable even twenty years ago. Japanese ‘self-defence’ forces now participate regularly in military exercises on Australian territory and in the region; having once considered and then abandoned purchase of Japanese submarines, the Australian government now plans to buy Japanese frigates for the Australian navy; and recently the Australian Navy docking in Yokosuka, Japan.

Cabinet ministers from both countries once participated in cabinet consultation meetings, consisting of several members of both cabinets, providing an opportunity for comprehensive bilateral discussions—now

replaced with the 2+2 format where the ministers for foreign affairs and defence meet for limited discussions. For long-term observers of the bilateral relationship, the turn to such defence priorities in the guise of ‘security’, is one of great concern. The world confronts global problems that require complex and courageous policies. Investing in military solutions that diminish our ‘security’—our collective right to feel secure in the 21<sup>st</sup> century—is, as Arendt suggested sixty years ago, ‘...a rather useless and obsolete trade.’

### **Celebrating fifty-years of Australia and Japan friendship and cooperation**

In 2026, there will be events celebrating the fifty years since the signing of the Basic Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Australia and Japan. It was a significant step at the time for two countries that had been bitter enemies in the Pacific War just thirty years earlier, and a history of commercial and diplomatic engagement dating from the late 1800s. Reading the treaty today, it is notable for its emphasis on reaffirming a solid foundation for cultural, educational and technological cooperation, in sustaining the then burgeoning trade and economic relationship. Defence, military and security aspects are not explicitly mentioned. How

binding is a treaty then, in the face of 'changing international circumstances' as the leaders of both governments might nowadays argue? The fifty-year anniversary will be a significant moment for reflection on the relationship.



The Australia-Japan relationship offers analysts a valuable case study of how broader notions of 'security' can be interpreted, and acted on. For while we might ask *how* can we do security differently in the 21st century, we need to also ask *why* we are not endeavouring to do so. It is of note that these sorts of questions began during the decade following the fall of the Berlin Wall. Some years prior to that, as a postgraduate student in Japan, looking at what we then called 'foreign policy', I was interested in how Japan in the postwar era sought to re-engage with the world, given the constraint that Article 9 (and the ambition of the preamble) put on military expansion.



At the time, Japan defied the typical 'superpower' status as an economic powerhouse without the concomitant military force. Various leaders over time had sought to establish Japan's role in the world as an aid donor, a contributor in ways other than military force. Japan became known as one of

the first leaders in 'soft power' or as 'Cool Japan' as it aimed to enhance its presence via more cultural attributes. A major economic downturn however, left many wondering what next for Japan.

Nonetheless, optimistic observers anticipated that Article 9 of the 1947 Constitution, explicitly prohibiting the maintenance of armed forces and acts of belligerence, would guide Japan's security direction. The election of Abe Shinzo as prime minister second time around in 2012 brought to the fore the tension between the competing security cultures which had guided postwar Japan. Abe, who was fatally wounded in a shooting while campaigning during the 2022 election, arguably made a dramatic shift in Japan's security outlook, not through constitutional amendment but via legislative processes in the parliament. Successive Australian governments have enabled a strengthening of Japan's more militaristic outlook under the guise of 'strategic partnership' and similar rhetoric. And while that shift in strategic posture is the subject of a separate study, in this paper I aim to offer a counter-narrative that articulates a more comprehensive and responsive security path in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although drawing on ever-diminishing reserves of optimism, I suggest that a better world remains possible and Japan and Australia as key players in the Asia-Pacific hemisphere, can draw on a significant comprehensive relationship to contribute to such an outcome.

What then might our alternatives be? What might a comprehensive human/being-focussed security look like? I am often challenged to answer this question by those who would say that war is inevitable and every responsible state must prepare for it. I sometimes flip the statement to ask what are the conditions that make peace inevitable? Why don't we ask that question? Instead of spiralling into a security dilemma, as we have observed in the East Asian region, imagine if we could talk about a 'peace dilemma', where



countries aspired to building a peaceful and secure environment.

### Realising the promise of human security

One approach which gained some currency during the decade of the 1990s, was 'human security'. From a UN report authored by Professors Ogata Sadako and Amartya Sen in the early 1990s, to the championing by Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo of its implementation as a key pillar of Japan's diplomacy, to the establishment of the Commission on Human Security (2003), human security has lingered on the periphery of the international relations discipline, a concept seen as too broad by some, and without practical heft by others. As envisioned by the initial report in the 1990s, and subsequently in the report launching the Commission for Human Security (2003), Ogata and Sen noted that 'human security' indeed centres on people, not the state and that

*'Human security complements state security, enhances human rights and strengthens human development. It seeks to protect people against a broad range of threats to individuals and communities and, further, to empower them to act on their own behalf.'*

What will it take to realise the promise of 'human security'? How can we in the Asia-Pacific region endeavour to prioritise a human-centred security approach in the face of escalating tensions between the United States and China, into which Australia and Japan, both enmeshed under the US security and nuclear umbrella, have been drawn?



Hugh White's recent Quarterly Essay, *Hard New World*, is timely in the current context and seeks to stimulate discussion for a world post-*pax Americana*. Of the many interesting points made in White's essay, of relevance to this article is his assertion on page 60, that Asia:

*'is the region in which Australia should be preparing to make its way. We should start by recognising that Asia's future, and Australia's, will not be decided in Washington. It will be decided in Asia.'*

I fear we may have missed numerous opportunities. This quote could have been plucked from any text on Australia and Asia in the 1980s, the 1990s, the early 2000s. For as long as I have been a student of the region's geopolitics, there has been discourse on Australia's place in Asia.

We have cultivated an environment where 'security' is now a default for 'defence', where improving security inevitably leads to bigger military budgets, largely unchallenged, where questioning alternative ways to make the world a better safe and secure place is dismissed as idealism. Increased militarisation and infinite defence budgets have failed to make the world a safer 'softer' place. Rather, we find ourselves in this new 'harder' world, confronted by dilemmas of our own making. How else can we view a new world order?

### Quad and AUKUS have undermined trust in the Asia-Pacific

The 1970s in Australia, in retrospect, appears to be an era where successive Australian governments were more amenable to engagement with our immediate region that, if continued, might have presented us with a different strategic environment. Rapprochement with the Peoples Republic of China, signing of a treaty of friendship and cooperation with Japan among other initiatives. On the back of these initiatives, universities took to strengthening our understanding of the region through focussed

and comprehensive programs on various Asian countries and cultures—programs that encouraged deep thinking and awareness,

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*Proponents of the promise and 'logic' of human security and those who would argue that 'military security' is the natural order, are at loggerheads*

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opportunities for extended in-country engagement. I take the argument back to education because our failings in appreciating alternative ways of thinking about security begin there.

In hitching our security saddles to the US we have become more like the US than we ought to have. Sometimes it feels we are in a death roll from which it is too late to extricate ourselves. In the region, the Quad and AUKUS have been judged as snubs to greater regional cohesiveness and the sooner we reconsider these moves the better. Both the Quad (four nations) and AUKUS (three nations) spoke to an exclusivity that decades of diplomacy seemed to ditch rather unceremoniously. Uncritical adoption of an 'Indo-Pacific' narrative over the more amenable Asia-Pacific environment has led to a diminution of trust by nations that feel thus excluded.

Proponents of the promise and 'logic' of human security and those who would argue that 'military security' is the natural order, are at loggerheads. We are indeed at a critical point in the international environment, arguably even more transforming than the post-Cold War decade. As we grapple with the urgency of contemporary international relations, we need models of security that offer genuine alternatives. In terms of recent developments in the Australia-Japan relationship outlined below, what it is now, I seek to re-present what it might be.

## **Locked in a 19<sup>th</sup> century Anglosphere**

The announcement of the so-called Quad was the first misstep in a security strategy that alarmed regional actors; the second was the exclusionary AUKUS, a proposal that had a brief window of opportunity to close down and restore trust. Instead, I suggest, these two 'pillars' do not make the region more secure but rather, and AUKUS in particular, re-establish an inappropriate strategy locked in a 19th century Anglosphere, a spiralling towards insecurity and mistrust.

AUKUS is the pivot to regional insecurity that no-one asked for, that took most of our regional allies by surprise, that has foreshadowed a return to 19th century western imperial dominance. The AUKUS architects fail to understand the changed circumstances of the lands once assumed to be ripe for colonisation. As we learn of more detail of this arrangement, it is becoming more apparent that the eventual costs to Australian strategic sovereignty will be compromised, not just in the near-term but, it seems, a very long time.

AUKUS has disrupted any semblance of a potential peace dilemma we might have aspired to in the region. Of course, the more hawkish operatives around the region will try and bandwagon. But is there enough will among key players to recalibrate this path?

The Quad, on the other hand, was a curious precursor to AUKUS. The idea that four different states could form a partnership across the Indian and Pacific Ocean expanse was nothing if not ambitious. Drawing together the US, Japan, Australia and India, under the under the guise of the region's 'leading democracies and proponents of a free and open Indo-Pacific', it was part of the strategic shift sought by Abe Shinzo to facilitate his government's ambitions to elevate Japan's position in the region. It drew on a concept originally proposed by Abe's grandfather and postwar Prime Minister, Kishi Nobusuke. In arguing that it was these four

states with the higher order of democratic and liberal values, it raised questions of the exclusion of like-minded nations such as, for example, South Korea and New Zealand, much less the relevance of existing groupings such as APEC.

In a world of increasing insularity, Australia and Japan could indeed recalibrate human security in the region. The framework is in place, it needs dusting off. The combination of the Basic Treaty in 1976 and the precedent set by Obuchi to prioritise human security as a key pillar of diplomacy enhance that framework.



### **Time for courageous leadership**

Imagine a courageous bilateral leadership, which offered reassurance that 'home' is a most powerful signal that builds a foundation, and we could start with this as our key building block of what it means to be secure, to be safe. If we revisit the concept of human security, it is human first, then security; instead, we have those who would focus on

'security' at the expense of what it is to be 'human'. We need to find ways to revert to putting 'human', in its broadest sense—people, planet, peace prosperity and partnerships (the five principles of a human security-inspired sustainable development).

In summary, Australia and Japan could assert those priorities by:

- reconvening the ministerial consultations that reach beyond the narrow frame of the 2+2 dialogues;
- assume leadership in the implementation of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and what lies beyond;
- recognise the legitimacy of Japan's Article 9 by enabling a cooperative implementation of non-military means of international assistance;
- consider multilateral cooperation which built on existing forums such as APEC and G20, and approached the region with a greater degree of independence from the strategic priorities of the United States.

### **Postscript:**

As I finalise this essay, PM Albanese has just visited Papua New Guinea to participate in celebrations recognising fifty years since independence from Australia, a much anticipated signing of a defence treaty deferred for the time being; in the same week, Nikkei Asia reported that outgoing Japanese Prime Minister Ishiba Shigeru has signed an agreement with Papua New Guinea to provide heavy machinery for disaster relief, under the guise of the Government's program of OSA, Official Security Assistance. It seems there are avenues for cooperation beyond a narrow militarized security frame.