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Abstract

The Howard government's appointment of Major-General Duncan Lewis in 2004 to head the National Security Division of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet received little critical comment. But it should have been subjected to a great deal of public scrutiny, investigation, and reflective consideration. It was the first time a senior military officer had been appointed to take over the running of a key policy advising agency this close to the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Just because he is now generally referred to as 'Mr' in his new capacity does not negate his background, training, interests, and the significance of his appointment. If the government had wanted a 'Mr' to begin with, it would have gone to the civilian civil service, instead of to the military.

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Duncan Lewis is a decorated career military officer with a background in diplomatic work, peace-keeping, counter-terrorism, and has Indonesian language skills. In 2002 he was the inaugural chief of Special Operations Command, and is a former commander of the elite covert Special Air Service Regiment (1990-1992). All well and good; we are probably in expert hands so far as terrorist threats from abroad are concerned. However the Major-General's brief includes internal domestic security matters. Arguably, so far as a democracy is concerned, this is the preserve of civil authorities and civil law, which is where the appointment goes right to the heart of our democracy.

As former High Court Justice Sir Victor Windeyer advised Justice Hope's *Protective Security Review* in 1979, the best safeguard against terror lies in "the rigorous enforcement of existing criminal law" rather than the making of new laws and the use of terrorism as a legal term. Herein lies the problem: terrorism is an ambiguous and slippery term to define, because motivation and purpose are what distinguish it from ordinary crimes of violence. This is a process of definition that can easily be politically manipulated. Alarming, as we have seen in everything from Children-Overboard to Weapons of Mass

Destruction, through to the Australian Wheat Board kickbacks, slippery language, ambiguities, and the political manipulation of language, are at the heart of the politics of Howard's Australia.

Increasing militarisation

The Duncan Lewis appointment reflected something more than concern for the well-being of the Australian people and Australian democracy. It reflected, and reflects, the increasing militarisation of Australian society and culture, a nation that spends more on its military than it does on education.

Does anyone remember the Peter Weir movie *Gallipoli*? Released in 1981, it was a confronting challenge to those Australian cultural and political forces that presented war and the martial spirit as something intrinsically Australian and Good. To a great extent it was part of the critique and questioning of war resulting from Australia's involvement in the Vietnam war. War through the lens of Weir was a maelstrom that lured the innocent and ignorant; a pointless, wasteful, human enterprise. I doubt whether he could produce his movie today, or that it would generate the anti-war response it did a quarter of a century ago. Today many Australians seem to be in love with the martial spirit and the idea of war. There is even talk of the reintroduction of conscription, and some of that talk is coming from within the ranks of the Australian Labor Party, a party that has had a long, bitter, and divisive entanglement with the issue since 1916.

To understand the militarisation of Australian society and culture we have to go back to 1972 and the end of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam war, which also marked the end of a generation of Australians at War. The Whitlam, and subsequent Coalition and Labor governments, abandoned the policy of forward defence. The Australian armed forces were left without external threats, enemies, and roles. The various armed services were at loggerheads with each other, competing for cuts of diminishing defence budgets, while declining service conditions failed to attract sufficient recruits. It was a mess crying out for reform. As the 1980s opened, the Australian army was incapable of meeting on short notice anything but a low level contingency.

War is Good

Reforms came in stages beginning in 1975, along with increased budgets. But what also had to be overcome was the traditional Australian disdain for the armed services in peacetime. This

was nibbled away at by a range of organisations, lobbyists and interest groups, including Australian War Memorial apparatchiks, the armaments industry, political spin doctors, historians, journalists, but significantly by leading politicians like Paul Keating and John Howard, keen to turn the Australian experience of war into a White Man's Dreaming, sanctifying venues of great horror and carnage like Gallipoli and Kokoda as sacred sites, and making war central to the definition of what it is to be Australian. What got lost in this process were senses of war as the failure of politics and diplomacy, as human tragedy on a vast scale, as brutality and carnage unleashed. Instead, war and martial options were portrayed as necessary parts of the human experience, rather than aberrant behaviour best avoided. In short, war was good for the national soul and the body politic.

Fortuitous terrorism

Terrorism fortuitously came along in 1978 with the mysterious, unclaimed, Hilton bombing (Sydney), possibly the result of a botched black operation by Australia's security agencies. In response, as we shall see in the subsequent article (Bowral Call-out of 1978), Prime Minister Fraser deployed domestically nearly 2000 troops to act as soldiers in peace-time against an unseen, unknown, never identified or described, possibly fictitious, domestic threat. Long term, this unprecedented and controversial decision, along with the bombing, had significant ramifications. Security was placed firmly on Australia's national agenda and fundamentally changed the nation. The power of the federal government in domestic affairs was strengthened; 'terrorism' became a specific legal entity; counter-terrorism became the preserve of the army; and in 2000 Australia got the *Defence Legislation Amendment (Aid to Civilian Authorities) Act 2000* making it easier for the federal government to use the armed forces in peace-time on domestic soil against perceived threats to 'Commonwealth interests', and enabling the army to have police powers.

The key term post-2000 is 'Commonwealth interests', a term that is vulnerable to political definition and manipulation. While the future is in the making and yet to be, the historical record shows that domestically, Labor and non-Labor governments have an extensive history of involving the armed forces in strike-breaking. John Howard and his neocons now control both houses of federal parliament. Key players who helped give us the criminal conspiracy of the War on the Waterfront are

in a position to do as they like to the Australian workforce, the trade union movement, and industrial relations. The point could well be reached where the Howard anti-union agenda is deemed to be in the best interests of the Commonwealth, and opposition to it perceived as requiring the stamp of the iron heel.