



# AUSTRALIANS FOR WAR POWERS REFORM

28 January 2021

Senator the Hon. Lynda Reynolds CSC  
Minister for Defence  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

c.c. Senator the Hon. Marise Payne, Minister for Foreign Affairs  
The Hon. Anthony Albanese MP, Leader of the Opposition  
Senator the Hon. Penny Wong, Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs  
The Hon. Richard Marles MP, Shadow Minister for Defence

Dear Senator Reynolds

## **Clarification of Reports of RAAF Drone Crew Training and Tasking in Middle East**

I write on behalf of Australians for War Powers Reform to seek clarification of Australia's current defence posture in the Middle East.

On 14 January 2018 then CDF Air Chief Marshal Binskin announced that RAAF air strikes over Iraq had ceased. In August 2020, we learned from UAS magazine that Australian pilots had been 'drafted to help fly UK drones over Middle East'. The same information appeared in the latest edition of the RAAF Association's quarterly magazine *Wings*, published mid-December 2020.

The source explained that 'Australian airforce pilots and private contractors are being drafted in to help fly UK armed Reaper drones over Syria and Iraq amid shortages in RAF crew and concern over the stresses of piloting deadly unmanned aircraft.' The author added that the RAAF presence 'allows the RAF to deploy its trained pilots more efficiently on combat missions and helps plug the crew shortages that are deemed to be the greatest risk to the UK's £1.1bn future drone programme.'

Australian government use of RAAF personnel as crew for RAF drones on combat operations in the Middle East is a remarkable development which should have been revealed to the Australian public – as the UK government did for its constituency – before any such deployments took place.

This evolving strategy for global combat-drone capability raises a number of important questions to which we believe the Australian public is entitled to clear answers. For example: can RAAF crews operate drones from Australia or only from somewhere in the region like Kuwait? From where are they in fact operating them? Are the reported Australian contractors

in the service of the RAF or the RAAF? Are RAF crew shortages caused by insufficient numbers of service people being willing to carry out these operations? Who are these 'combat missions' aimed at? What ADF presence remains in Iraq and Syria? What is the legal basis for the ADF to be carrying out drone strikes in Syria?

Australians for War Powers Reform would appreciate your answers to these questions. We consider that the engagement of Australian military personnel in this way, without proper disclosure and fully informed debate, reinforces the need for the war powers to be transferred to the Parliament.

Yours sincerely,



(Paul Barratt AO)  
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