



The Hon Linda Reynolds CSC
Minister for Defence
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
23rd March 23, 2020

Dear Minister

The Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN) has indicated its opposition to the presence of USA marines in Darwin for as long as they have been there. Up until now, the reasons for our opposition have been strategic. The group has argued that the presence of the marines bestows no strategic benefit to Australia; that it actually makes the country less safe, by displaying Australia's willingness to involve itself militarily with the USA, as that nation actively confronts China.

The emergence and spread of the coronavirus gives us a further reason for communicating with you on the matter. We seek your assurance that you will do all things within your power to protect the nation from the spread of Coronavirus.

Our organisation keeps aware of current events. It is aware of restrictions on all foreign nationals arriving in Australia. As measures to limit and slow down the spread of the disease, the restrictions are viewed as entirely sensible. However, we also believe that they should be applied across the board, with no exceptions.

We were dismayed, then, to hear the Prime Minister, on Friday March 20, failing to rule out the possible arrival of US personnel, who might fly in to Alice Springs for work at Pine Gap. He appeared to indicate that this was a 'security' matter – implying that such matters can take precedence over all others (including, in this case, the health of the nation).

We note that US forces in Europe have cases of coronavirus amongst their number¹. Clearly, military personnel are no more or less likely than ordinary citizens to contract the disease, which is indiscriminate in who it infects.

¹ <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2020/mar/20/us-military-preparing-worst-case-scenario-europe-c/> (reported in the Washington Times on March 20).

Why, then, has there been no message from you to indicate that the 2,500 marines, scheduled to arrive in Darwin from the beginning of April, will not be coming during this time of crisis?

This matter is particularly urgent for the people of Alice Springs, who include many vulnerable indigenous people.

In IPAN's view, national security involves a lot more than mere military security. Protecting the health of the nation is more important than maintaining good relations with an unreliable ally (the USA). There is no pressing and immediate need for ADF forces to exercise with their US counterparts. There is no military threat to our nation for the foreseeable future.

In our view, there are no arguments strong enough to convince the Australian people that it is necessary to have one set of restrictions placed on the general population and a different, exceptional set applied to the military personnel of the USA.

We therefore call on you to persuade your Cabinet colleagues that the security of the nation would be best protected by including USA military personnel in the restrictions on arrivals from overseas. In anticipation of a decision to ensure that travel restrictions should be applied uniformly, we ask that you explain to USA military authorities that there can be no deployment of US marines to Darwin, at least until the pandemic subsides.

We look forward to hearing a public announcement on the matter in coming days.

Yours sincerely

Annette Brownlie
Chairperson

Independent and Peaceful Australia Network

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