

The world is heating up, and it's not just the greenhouse effect.

Tensions in the Middle East and in parts of Asia and the Pacific are raising the temperature in international relations. Perched as we are on the rim of a growing 'arc of instability' – and with the new US Administration signalling its support for an active Australian involvement in regional affairs – the first decade of the 21st Century looks certain to present some important challenges for Australian foreign, defence and trade policy.

That's why Parliament's Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, established 50 years ago, remains as relevant today as it did when the 'Cold War' first cast its shadow over international affairs.

With its role in reviewing foreign affairs, defence, trade and human rights issues relevant to Australia, the Committee is helping to bring into the public arena issues that traditionally might have been kept 'behind closed doors'.

The Chair of the Committee, Alan Ferguson (Senator for SA), says the Committee has a unique and important role in the Australian Parliament.

"It has the role, on behalf of the Parliament, to examine all areas of decision-making relating to foreign affairs, defence and trade," Senator Ferguson said.



Photo: AFP (Newspix)

"This area of policy is particularly significant in determining Australia's role both internationally and domestically.

"In addition, it serves as a vehicle for the public at large to express their views on a wide range of Government activities."

Seven major investigations are currently being conducted by the Sub-Committees through which the Committee operates.

## Parliament's 50-year Foreign Affairs

The Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade has a history dating from the 1949 federal election campaign.

Foreign policy in the immediate post-war years had been dominated by the Labor Government's Foreign Minister, Dr Evatt, through his high profile in the international arena.

During the '49 campaign, Opposition Leader Robert Menzies observed that foreign policy "should not be the preserve of one party, indeed one Minister". He asserted "there should be an all-party Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs to act, not as a creator of policy (which is the privilege and

responsibility of the government of the day) but as a source of information to Parliament and therefore to public opinion".

In October 1951 the Menzies Government introduced a resolution into the Parliament to act on this promise. However, it was not all plain sailing.

The first Resolution of Appointment of the Committee effectively subordinated it to the Minister for External Affairs. It could only meet privately and all reports had to be submitted to the Minister for his decision as to their tabling and printing. And the Minister alone could refer matters to the Committee and decide what "persons, papers and records" should be available to it.

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The Labor Party in Opposition strenuously objected to these early constraints and refused to participate, a position maintained for more than 15 years. As a result, until the mid-60s the Committee was composed wholly of Government members and presented just five reports.

The deadlock was broken early in May 1967 when External Affairs Minister Paul Hasluck, expressing a wish to make the Committee "more widely representative of the Parliament", moved an appointing resolution which finally met the main objections of the Opposition. The first Labor appointees to the Committee included Kim Beazley Senior, who became Deputy Chairman.

The Committee's powers and areas of focus were broadened after the 1972 election to include Defence, with 'Trade' added to the Committee's title following the 1987 election.

Today's Committee looks at matters referred to it by either House of the Parliament, or the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Defence or Trade. The Committee may also inquire into matters raised in annual reports of relevant Commonwealth Government departments and authorities or in reports of the Commonwealth Auditor-General.

The full Committee consists of 32 members:

- 20 Members of the House (12 nominated by the Government and eight by the Opposition); and
- 12 Senators (five nominated by the Government, five by the Opposition, and two by a minor party or independent).

The Committee today is in fact more like five Committees, with Sub-Committees for each of its titular subject areas (Foreign Affairs, Defence, Trade) plus separate Sub-Committees for Human Rights and, currently, the United Nations. Members of the full Committee can join any or all of the five Sub-Committees.

The full Committee meets at least once every sitting week, as do each of the Sub-Committees. Regular public hearings are scheduled for inquiries, and on-site inspections are conducted as required.

Regular briefings are held with experts from around the globe, including Australian and Foreign Ambassadors, Australian Ministers, Ministers and delegations from Foreign Governments, senior office holders from the UN and other global organisations, senior advisers and officials from Australian and Foreign Governments and Departments, and private individuals.

Alan Ferguson (Senator for SA) is the Chair of the Committee and Colin Hollis (Member for Throsby, NSW) is Deputy Chair.

#### For more information

Visit: [www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt)  
Call: (02) 6277 2313  
Email: [jscfadt@aph.gov.au](mailto:jscfadt@aph.gov.au)

## United Nations Sub-Committee

Chair: Alan Ferguson (Senator for SA)  
Deputy Chair: Colin Hollis (Member for Throsby, NSW)  
Current inquiry: Australia's relations with the United Nations

A special Sub-Committee has been formed to inquire into the United Nations and Australia's relationship with the organisation in the post Cold War environment.

The inquiry is looking at:

- proposals to reform the structure of the UN and address its funding shortfall;
- the increasing demand for peacekeeping operations and the implications of intervention in internal national disputes;
- the role of the UN in transition after peacekeeping;
- the capacity of the UN to protect human rights and address war crimes and crimes of genocide;



- the possibility of a standing Army for the UN; and
- the viability of the International Criminal Court.

More than 120 submissions have been received for the inquiry and public hearings have been held in Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney.

The inquiry's final hearings are scheduled to be held in March and will include appearances by the Federal Police, Australian Electoral Commission, international lawyers, and the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Defence.

A report is expected to be tabled in the Winter session.

**You can find an Issues Paper and the UN Charter at:**  
[www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt/U\\_Nations/UNIndex.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt/U_Nations/UNIndex.htm)

*Photos: Parliament's Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee in action. Committee members meet with (from left to right) the Dalai Lama; UN Special Commission Chief Richard Butler and Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali; former South African President F. W. de Klerk; and current UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.*

## Defence Sub-Committee

Chair: David Hawker (Member for Wannon, Vic)  
 Deputy Chair: Roger Price (Member for Chifley, NSW)  
 Current inquiry: Examination of Annual Report of Department of Defence. Includes:  
 – Brutality in the Army (3RAR parachute battalion)  
 – Value of Defence Exercises  
 – Acquisitions  
 – Personnel issues

Recent report: *From Phantom to Force* – Report into the Army  
 Other activities: Follow-up to *From Phantom to Force* report

Allegations of brutality within the Army's parachute battalion (3RAR) have generated plenty of media headlines and have been investigated as a matter of priority by the Defence Sub-Committee.

The report on that investigation is being drafted and is expected to be tabled before Easter.

The Sub-Committee is also taking the procedurally rare step of conducting a formal follow-up to its recent report on the Australian Army, *From Phantom to Force*. The Sub-Committee has asked for comments from those who put in submissions to the original inquiry and is obtaining additional costings on its recommendations.

A 'follow-up' public hearing has been scheduled, with witnesses expected to be some of those most affected by the inquiry's original recommendations. It is expected that a follow-up report will be tabled in Parliament before Easter.

After Easter the Committee will shift its focus to two other areas of the Defence Department – the value of the costly program of defence exercises and the efficiency and effectiveness of the defence acquisitions process. A call for submissions and a public hearings schedule will be announced shortly.

**For more information on the Defence Sub-Committee visit:**  
[www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt)



## Trade Sub-Committee

Chair: Geoff Prosser (Member for Forrest, WA)  
 Deputy Chair: Neil O'Keefe (Member for Burke, Vic)  
 Current inquiry: Enterprising Australia – planning, preparing and profiting from trade and investment  
 Recent report: *Australia's Trade and Investment Relationship with South America*

The role of development agencies in economic expansion – one of the hottest issues in trade policy – is the subject of a new Trade Sub-Committee inquiry.

With the success of the Industrial Development Agency in Ireland and the Economic Development Board in Singapore, the inquiry will examine how these bodies operate, as well as the full range of incentives and impediments to foreign investment in Australia.

Cataloguing what's already happening in Australia as well as overseas, the inquiry will look at comparative transport systems, taxation, telecommunications infrastructure, production costs, industrial relations structures, legal systems, the federal system of government, and research and development initiatives.

It will also look at the adequacy of the workforce in Australia, particularly in new growth areas such as financial services, IT, e-business, education, pharmaceuticals and health care.

The Sub-Committee is currently taking submissions and has already been swamped with interest.

The election of George W. Bush in the US has also thrown a renewed focus onto the Sub-Committee's recent report into Australia's trade relationship with South America.

South America is emerging as a growth region of considerable economic significance. With the Bush Administration indicating it will put an emphasis on the area, the warning in the report that Australian businesses and the Australian Government may have already missed the boat in terms of gaining and developing market access rings even louder.

The report, which has 30 concrete recommendations for action by the Government, was tabled in September and is awaiting a Government response.

**For information about the Enterprising Australia or South America inquiries, visit:**  
[www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt) or call: (02) 6277 2313