DATA CENTRES

an issue for peace and independence

From the old Ford factory in Melbourne's north to the edge of the Tanami Desert, data centres are popping up all over Australia.

Communities in both Melbourne and Sydney have started to campaign against datacentres in their communities. Local opposition focusses on things like fuel and battery storage risks and the interminable 'hum' that emanates from them. Wider opposition is based on environmental considerations such as their power and water usage and fuel storage and the broader AI issue of copyright laws.

All of these issues are incredibly important at a time when we are seeing first hand the disastrous effects of climate change, but once again the issue of the militaristic implications are in danger of being left off the agenda.

This little leaflet, put together for those already working on issues of militarism and sovereignty, seeks to raise some issues that we may all be working on in the near future.

a renegade activists occasional paper July 2026 for the Adelaide IPAN Conference

"One modern gatling gun will tear a board fence to pieces a mile away in four minutes, and at a range of one mile it will gnaw off a foot-thick pine post in seven minutes."

George R Kirkpatrick 1910

In his seminal work "War-What For?" written in 1910, American socialist and anti-militarist George Ross Kilpatrick used the line above to convince young men not to enlist. These Gatling guns that he referred to throughout the book as "MODERN MURDERING MACHINES" were the ultimate weaponry in the pre WWI arsenal.

Today that quote sounds rather quaint.

Tomorrow, in a war undertaken by Artificial Intelligence driven uncrewed weapons, the weapons systems many of us have campaigned against for decades will sound just as quaint.

That tomorrow is not far off.

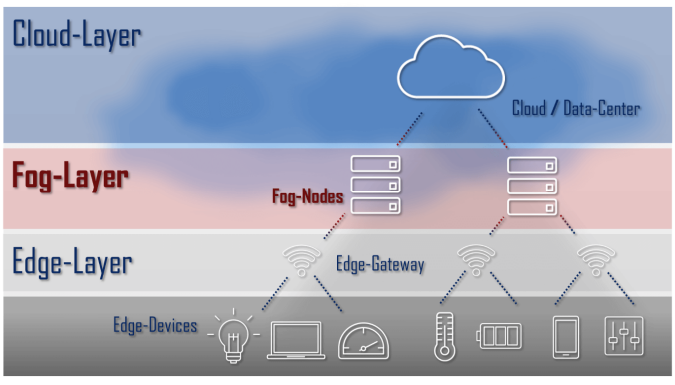
As AI is incorporated into all our new weapons systems, we need to understand that AI does not exist in an ethereal realm separate from the physical world. AI depends on computing power and that computing power is located in data centres all over the world. Data centres are the 'bricks and mortar' of AI.

Most of the data centres being built in Australia are not directly used by the military, but data centres do not exist in isolation from each other they are all connected to each other; that's how they work: as part of what's become known as 'Cloud computing'. Connectivity requires physical assets as well; the cables and satellites that know encircle the planet.

Therefore each and every data centre plays a part in the development of AI systems that drive not just annoying prompts on our phones but the systems that targeted 156 civilians in a girls' school in Iran only five months ago.

Data centres do not only operate cloud computing, but 'fog' computing too. Analogous to fog being closer to Earth than clouds, fog computing is computing closer to its end use. This means that information can arrive microseconds sooner to its destination, and that not all information about an AI system needs to be shared in the cloud.

Fog computing takes place either on-site in corporations or in data centres like the proposed 20 000 hectare "Ares Project" in the Northern Territory, a location chosen due to its proximity to the major military facilities being built in the Top End.



There is also Dew and Edge computing which takes place on local machine and in 'things' like cars or weapons.

What would George Kilpatrick think?

The most decisive infrastructure of the twenty-first century isn't a gatling gun.
It isn't even floating in the Pacific
or flying around the planet:
It hums along inside the walls of a data centre.

This is not news to military strategists and planners. That's why Iran has made a point of targeting them in Bahrain and the UAE. Why the US targeted an Iranian operated by the State Bank and its why Ukraine has been targeting Russian data centres not with drones or missiles but with hackers.

A modern military can no sooner operate without the computing capacity of data centres than it could without fossil fuels.

Artificial intelligence isn't just about weapons and war-fighting however. It is increasingly becoming a part of our everyday lives. This further entangles the Military Industrial Complex into the whole of society. Just as it can not be proved that any particular data centre is used in any particular war, the corollary is also true. These data centres, with their potential to wage war, are being built at an alarming rate all over Australia.

There is already a sizeable momentum against the building of data centres on environmental, social, power and let's face it, NIMBY grounds. The military aspects of these data centres needs to be added to the myriad other issues that data centres are being challenged on.

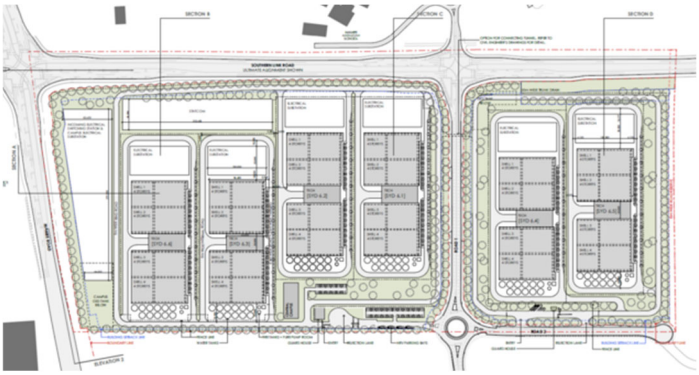
The proliferation of AI and data centres are not only used to fight wars, but helps to create them. For many years Australia's military build up has been justified by the threat of an aggressive China, particularly towards Taiwan , the largest producer of the necessary chips in the world. The Global West's paranoia over China is substantially due to their not wanting to lose control of the Taiwanese microprocessor industry and of course to stop China having access to the most sophisticated chips available.

In building data centres to improve the military's position in regard to China, we are in fact exacer-bating the problem.

It is also financial of course, the three companies involved in making the most advanced chips in the world: Nvidia that holds the patents, Dutch company ASML that makes the factories and TSMC, the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company together have an economy that is considered to be larger than most nations.

The increase in data centres means an increase in the mining of critical minerals. The proliferation of data centres is also in part responsible for an increase in the mining of rare earths and critical minerals. This in turn is at least partly responsible for many of the 'low level' (unless you're in them) wars in East Africa as Western powers compete for access by arming different sides of a conflict. These conflictsalso contribute to the spreading of diseases such as Ebola as local populations are unable to move or seek treatment. Access to critical minerals has also been behind the coups and counter-coups across the Sa-hel, the opening up of the Arctic for mining and the US' hunger for Greenland.

Data centres are mirroring the industrial trajectory of the Military Industrial Complex in Australia.



Proposed new Zerra data centre on site of old Ford factory in Broadmeadows

Australia has a problem with maintaining its industrial base. Since entering a plethora of 'free trade' agreements around the turn of this century, its industrial base which was largely centred around automobile production found itself in dire straits. This was a significant contributing factor to the transfer of its industrial base to military production.

Not only were the large auto plants given over to companies such as ASDAM for the production of F35 parts and the like, but many smaller factories previously supplying parts to Holden, Ford or Toyota had to retool to provide parts for the likes of Lockheed, Northrop and Boeing.

The Australian Government facilitated this transfer through all manner of instruments including refitting grants, tax write offs, courting 'defence primes' with special deals and the like. Since Aukus the removal of restrictions for parts exports has put this process on steroids.

We are seeing the same thing taking place with data centres today.

This is perhaps best exemplified by the planned Zerra Dune Project on the site of the old Ford Factory in Broadmeadows.

The Federal and State governments are champing at the bit at the prospects of investments. State governments are competing with each other for the opportunity of hosting these data centres in the same way they competed for defence industries.

In Victoria the State Government has cut councils out of the approval process and invested the power to the Department of Planning. In NSW, where data centres account for 12% of all non residential building investment, the Government is fast tracking approvals through the Investment Delivery Authority.

Every government is talking up the prospects of jobs and economic benefits. While PM Albanese this month flagged the idea of an IA framework, it was primarily concerned with the protection of copyright of Australian artist's work. This would be impossible to implement but gives the Government the appearance of not rolling over to big business. The other key Albanese issue was data centres needing to produce their own power: this is a given as projects such as Zerra's would require the same power use as a city of 400 000 people; and that's just one of the currentl hhalf dozen planned for the Melbourne metro area.
The projects in the NT would feed directly off the gas from the Beetaloo Basin.

AUKUS Pillar II is generating military advantage by converting cutting-edge advanced technology into timely, relevant military capabilities. It is focused on those requirements that AUKUS militaries need to operate together by leveraging cutting-edge technologies in:

- ***quantum***
- ***advanced cyber***
- ***electronic warfare***
- ***undersea warfare***
- ***autonomy and artificial intelligence***
- ***hypersonics and counter-hypersonics.***

The focus of AUKUS in both the media and the peace movement has largely been on the nuclear submarines. Whilst the possibility of Australia ever receiving nuclear submarines remains up in the air, there remains the likelihood of a scaled down Pillar I that will see new submarine bases constructed to be used by the US fleet and the whole question of waste. The Nuclear Power Safety Act was passed in 2025 that established the office of the Australian Nuclear Power Safety Regulator as the overarching authority for all things nuclear.

Meanwhile a number of laws have been changed to facilitate the implementation of Aukus Pillar II. These are mainly bundled under the Defence Exports Amendments Act 2024 and include things like:

- a licence free environment for exports between Aukus countries
- Australia being deemed a 'domestic source' for the US arms industry
- Limiting international co-operation on technical aspects of goods on the DSGL list (including Section 2 'Dual Use') to citizens of 30 countries

Data centres, both their physical and software components fall under the Defence & Strategic Goods List Part 2 Categories 4 & 5…

> *As the CEO of NextDC put it when building their first Darwin data centre in 2023: "Its proximity to Darwin's CBD and direct access to the major submarine cable infrastructure, means legacy industries such as mining and resources* ***alongside the emerging defence sector*** *can have real-time responsiveness to operational and mission-critical needs, fully capturing the value of emerging technologies."*

The military uses of data centres is not an afterthought or 'also ran' it was one of the criteria for positioning them near military facilities to best utilise the Cloud—Edge advantage.

Since then there are two data hyper centres in Darwin and two more being planned that would be amongst the largest data centres in the world. These two, on Murrunji Station on the NE edge of the Tanami and at Weddel just south of Darwin would each use more electrical energy than is currently consumed in the NT as a whole.

They will be at the core of all US military operations coming out of the Top End… and much like Pine Gap, as Iran has recently shown they will be targets.

Critical Infrastructure isn't just a description, it's a legal category that brings with it a whole new set of rules and offences.

CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE SECURITY CENTRE

Data centres are regarded as critical infrastructure under the Security of Critical Infrastructure Act .

This brings in a raft of laws not just on the centre operators but on any criminal matter brought about through protesting, or perhaps even campaigning against these facilities.

In the same way that defence industry has the Office of Defence Industry Support (ODIS), data centres are receiving advice on securing their developments from the government. This is still in the early stages as data centre constructure has not yet reached the same exposure as defence industry, but we can assume that as this industry develops the Critical Infrastructure Security Centre will become increasingly prominent, as will the Australian Signals Directorate which in addition to foreign intelligence gathering has taken on the role as the government agency responsible for all aspects of cyber security.

ASD is of course Australia's main agency in the Five Eyes intelligence alliance.

The involvement of ASD further ties the data centre industry to the defence and intelligence community.

Data centres are an integral part of every facet of Aukus Pillar II. The first acknowledged project of Pillar II is the development of payloads and systems for Uncrewed Underwater Vessels (UUVs). These underwater vessels, having autonomous systems, rely heavily on AI and the thus the whole data centre infrastructure. Their main purpose also concerns the AI infrastructure: patrolling and defending the underwater cables connecting data centres around the world.

Another aspect of Pillar II is the co-development of space technologies. Again, this is a self perpetuating need as space is increasingly being seen as not just a platform for ground based activities, but potentially a location for future massive data centres and even for factories, where zero gravity enables the production of the silicon chips that make data centres possible thinner than they can at ground level: This is the reason behind Southern Launch's testing talking place from Sue Hazeldine's land near Ceduna.

Implications for peace activists

Pine Gap Protest 20 July 2026

This little leaflet was hastily put together in the few days before the 2026 IPAN Conference in the spirit of opening the discussion on the issues we raised in it.

While we can't put the data centre genie back in the bottle any more than George Kirkpatrick, we can expose its links to the Australian military's in the US's global war machine.

Dozens of proposed data centres have been cancelled in the US due to people's concerns about environmental issues and people around Australia are starting to mobilise against them here.

NO DATA CENTRE IN CAMPBELLFIELD

Zerra DC has an application for a hyper scale data centre campus called 'Project Dune' at the Old Ford Factory Site at 300-340 Barry Road Campbellfield

Who are Zerra DC?

Zerra describes themselves as the "infrastructure partner of choice for the world's fastest scaling technology businesses". Zerra are owned by AGP, a Singapore based investment firm.

Why don't we want a data centre in our suburb?

Data centres cause:

- Grid Overload: **increased power bills** and **power outages** from massive energy usage
- **Environmental Degradation**: Severe impacts from the massive water usage needed to cool servers
- Fire Hazards: **increased fire risk** from the large amount of fuel and battery storage required onsite
- Transport Risks: **increased power outages** and **fire risks** to the nearby Upfield Train Station and Hume Highway
- National Security Risks: **Heightened risk of cyber attacks** potentially exposing your personal information
- Disruption: **24/7 noise and light pollution**
- **Heat Spikes**: Studies from the US report increases in ground temperature of 2-9°C within a 10km radius. Spikes are worse in summer when residential air conditioners compete with the cooling systems of the data centres

Whilst these are not yet concerned with aspects of militarism inherent in AI and data centres, there is significant scope to join forces with these campaigns in a similar way to the campaign against uranium mining, nuclear power and First Nations issues.

Issues of sovereignty are also starting to be discussed in mainstream society: data centres, owned and controlled as they are by some of the nastiest corporations on the planet and utilised by the US military are as much an attack on Australian sovereignty as Pine Gap or the Marine Rotation Force.

As noted in this little paper, the implications of Australia embracing the data centre industry, both as an ill-advised attempt at investment and due to the successful opposition to the in the US are enormous.

While the Federal Government is starting to consider some restrictions on data centres on environmental grounds, with laws that will not be in place until after the horse has bolted. We need to begin taking this issue seriously now: while there is still time to effect change.

Personal implications for peace activists

As noted data centres are categorised as critical infrastructure: this means that any actions taken, protests against or possibly even campaigning against could attract harsher penalties in much the same way as protests at military bases do.

On 16 July Australia attended a forum in the US with the fantastic sounding name of "Ministerial on the Resurgence of Political Terrorism" where we, along with 60 odd other countries were pressured to join the Trump campaign "To crush radical left terrorism": We see no reason that the Albanese Government will do anything other than comply.

Today, the Trump Administration convened senior officials from governments around the world to launch an unprecedented global offensive against the transnational threat of Radical Left terrorism. Under the leadership of President Donald J. Trump, far-left extremism will be treated with the same seriousness and ferocity the world has long reserved for jihadist terrorism.

The move to treat peace activists as terrorists has already begun: we have seen arrests take place in NSW and Victoria using military style equipment and tactics that we have not seen before.

Similar moves have taken place in the UK with the government's campaign against Palestine Action.

Although that was overturned by the courts and some charges in Australia were similarly overturned, it is a matter of time before the charges start to stick. Australia's anti terrorist czar, Mike Burgess has already started moving the target of Australia's intelligence community towards 'far-left' ideologies. This is not just a law enforcement issue: the Royal Commission into Antisemitism is also successfully blurring the boundaries between opposition to a genocidal state and racism.

Looking at these moves through the lens of the criminal data now being shared with US law enforcement agencies through the provisions of the 2021 CLOUD Act and the Australian Governments 'so what' approach to the US announcement last year that they were monitoring Australian 'criminals' through their agencies and we are getting closer still to the dystopian nightmare we have feared.