

Why were tanks and soldiers paraded through the streets of Adelaide, Australia?

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Many people have expressed their shock and anger over a military parade last Saturday, which saw hundreds of troops marching through the centre of the Australian city of Adelaide, together with two Abrams battle tanks.

The whole display had an ominous and foreboding character. The soldiers, in full uniform, marched in disciplined columns. The presence of the tanks, in a city centre, was highly unusual, if not unprecedented in the recent period. The troops manning the Abrams tanks appeared to be in full combat uniform, including helmets and black sunglasses.

There was no waving to the crowd. But there was also hardly any crowd to speak of. The population of Adelaide, the state capital of South Australia, had been given virtually no notice of what was to occur.

In addition to the heavy militarist atmosphere provided by the soldiers and the tanks, clergymen added a touch of medievalism to the display. In ceremonial robes they marched at the head of the procession. They too were not smiling or waving, but looked like auxiliary soldiers with grim expressions and a purposeful military-style gait.

The pretext for the parade was as strange as the event itself. Last year, the army's 1st Armoured Regiment was formally transferred from Darwin, in northern Australia, to Adelaide, in the country's south, a move that had been underway for five years.

The parade, however, was not a celebration of the troop relocation, though even that would have been a dubious basis for such a display. Instead, it was to mark the transfer of the regiment's Guidon and First Standard from a church in Darwin to St Peter's Cathedral in Adelaide.

On Facebook, the army command explained that this "enables the regiment's current and former serving

members to be physically closer to these sacred devices and reflect on their history." The Guidon and the First Standard are two pieces of cloth.

To anyone outside the world of the military, with its cult-like traditions, and the church, all of this can only appear bizarre.

As with many such traditions, there is an element of sham to the whole thing. The First Standard is not some ancient artifact. According to the army's website it was made and given to the regiment in 2002, apparently replacing a previous standard that had been presented by Prince Charles in 1981. The text of the current standard glorifies the regiment's role in the brutal, neo-colonial war against the Vietnamese people.

The handful of media reports on the parade have elicited a sharply negative response. A Channel 7 news bulletin, with footage of the march, has gone viral on Twitter and other social media platforms.

A typical comment beneath the Channel 7 tweet of its news report said: "A priest leads troops and tanks down an Australian street. This is horrifying. How dare you promote such nationalism and aggressive behavior. Shameful."

Another: "The priests at the front... this is something out of the 19th Century come to life. Awful. Anachronistic. Disturbing."

Others noted that the parade had the vibe of displays commonly associated with militarised and authoritarian states. Comparisons were made with North Korea. "Cool and normal much like a military-led regime would do," a user commented.

Jake Hanrahan, a well-known journalist from Britain who has covered the far-right extensively, including in armed forces, shared the Channel 7 footage with the simple question: "What the f*** is going on in Australia?"

Behind the nonsense about the Guidon and the First Standard, several processes were at work in the display.

First of all, the march, and its overtly militaristic form, were clearly a political decision. The ceremonial cloths could have been transferred with half the fuss or less, as such artifacts must have been before.

Instead they were the flimsy pretext for a show of military strength and a promotion of the armed forces, not only in a general sense, but as an intimidating, combat-ready force.

That aligns with a broader build-up of the military. The armed forces, and their funding, have been greatly expanded over the past decade, in keeping with Australia's alignment with an aggressive US military build-up in preparation for war with China.

The current federal Labor government is completing Australia's transformation into a frontline state in these plans for a catastrophic conflict. In April, it endorsed a Defence Strategic Review (DSR), calling for a massive acquisition of strike capabilities, above all missiles, for the army, airforce and navy. Labor has also committed to a \$368 billion program to acquire nuclear-powered strike submarines in league with the US and Britain.

Increasingly, Australia is playing a key role in American imperialism's war drive on a global scale. It may be a coincidence, but the Adelaide parade occurred just days before Prime Minister Anthony Albanese travelled to Europe to participate in a NATO summit planning the next escalation of Washington's proxy war with Russia in Ukraine.

The imposition of these militarist policies requires a political shift, away from the nominally democratic traditions that have prevailed, though in an increasingly attenuated form, since the end of World War II.

The military and the army must be brought to the centre stage of social and political life. That was the message of the DSR, which insisted that the military build-up had to be a "whole-of-nation effort." The review declared that "national unity and cohesion," concepts premised on the suppression of social and political opposition, were decisive.

That shows the other reason for the growing prominence of the military. Increasingly, the presence of the army and other branches of the defence force has been normalised. In repeated bushfires, floods and during the COVID pandemic, the absence of adequate civilian infrastructure has been used as a pretext for the

domestic deployment of the armed forces.

This is occurring under conditions of soaring social tensions. Workers are experiencing the worst cost of living crisis in decades. While rents, mortgage repayments, utility bills, food prices and everything else are skyrocketing, real wages are being cut. Since the start of the pandemic, the ultra-rich have become wealthier than ever before, while the working class has suffered a historic reversal in social conditions, on top of 40 years of cuts to jobs, wages and conditions.

In numbers of countries around the world, such as France and Sri Lanka, these global processes have already resulted in social upheavals. Whatever the tempo of events, governments everywhere realise that they are sitting on top of a social powder keg that will increasingly intersect with anti-war sentiment, as the danger of global military conflict becomes more apparent.

Under those conditions, the bringing forward of the armed forces domestically has an unmistakably authoritarian and anti-democratic character.

As many social media comments noted, the Adelaide military display occurred little over a month after the South Australian state Labor government passed sweeping anti-protest laws, which provide the authorities with means to ban virtually all demonstrations, campaigns and public political activities.



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