



Background Sheet 2: Social and Community

People's Inquiry: Exploring the Case for an Independent and Peaceful Australia

What are the costs and consequences of Australia's involvement in US-led wars and the US-alliance?

Militarisation of Society

The US military presence in Australia is not widely acknowledged, or even known, amongst the Australian people, arguably by design. This very fact calls into question our sovereignty and independence. Do the Australian people consent to this? What would be the outcome if not? These questions are not being sufficiently discussed in public discourse or media.

We have a lot of work to do to achieve such a society and encouraging values of support for community is integral to moving in that direction. Addressing issues of poverty, homelessness, racism, as well as a focus on foreign aid, should be priorities.

US culture has significant influence in Australian media and entertainment and is reinforced by constant messaging by our political leaders about how we have shared values. The US culture tends to place priority on individualism, where the vulnerable are treated as 'losers. The appalling US health care system, which threatens to be exported

to its allies,¹ epitomises this lack of priority given to serving the needs of ordinary people.

Australia, by contrast, has a health care system that while by no means perfect, does attempt to provide more egalitarian health care, giving all Australians (and some overseas visitors) "access to a wide range of health and hospital services at low or no cost".² Australia should continue to strengthen such approaches which reflect values around fairness and equity and we must resist being unduly influenced by other countries' approaches that don't reflect these values.

Impact on First Nations' Peoples

Since the colonisation of this country began, First Nations' people have been disrespected, had their culture suppressed, knowledge ignored and injustice after injustice piled upon them. We need a society that reverses these injustices and recognises the value of Aboriginal culture and people. True independence for Australia must be based upon recognition of the history and current

¹www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/dec/11/nhs-us-health-care-trade-deal-uk-election

² <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/medicare>



reality of racism and paternalism in the makeup of Australia as a nation. Redressing this history and changing this current reality is a first task for an independent Australia.



Impact on Race Relations

Racism has a long history in Australia, from the White Australia Policy until present day. Further to this history, our participation in US-led wars leads to the promotion in our country of racist attitudes which arise as part of the ideological or moral justification for the atrocities committed against the peoples of countries attacked by the US and its Allies. Islamophobic and anti-Arab racism (and that towards other Middle Eastern peoples) exploded in response to the US “War on Terror”, and today we see anti-Chinese and other anti-Asian racist attitudes encouraged as a result of the new US “pivot to Asia” - a phrase which originally had seemingly peaceful, cooperative objectives, but the material causes of which led directly to the US treating the rise of China as a threat to US power in the world.

Pro-social Priorities are Crucial

The US alliance entails significant lost opportunities for the Australian people. The simplest illustration of this is that the US pushes us, and all of its allies, towards committing 2% of GDP to military spending.

Military spending should not be such a priority for Australia when it is recognised that we do not have real enemies, apart from those which are a result of our alliance with the US. This is a huge amount in real terms that cannot be justified and cuts into funding for vital fiscal programs which deliver social and community benefits – such as welfare, public housing, childcare and aged care. All of these areas, which require federal funding, are diminished by the lack of priority given to them. The current level of military expenditure we see is in fact a consequence of the Alliance with the US.

Australian complicity in US aggressive policy is in accord with government policy that does not put the needs and interests of people first. Military spending as a large component of the Budget gives the Government an ideological excuse not to increase social spending. We can see this with the government’s pursuit of the further privatisation of healthcare, aged care, childcare and education, and the repeated cutting of funding to these areas of vital importance to the lives of Australians. The Government calls for frugality in these areas but at the same time commits larger and

larger, sums of public money towards military build-up.



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The presence of the US military also encourages the militarisation of our society, where the memorialising of past wars and battles lost is given much more priority than addressing the complex and multiple physical and mental health needs of returned service personnel.

Arms manufacturers, with the major ones being US companies, providing scholarships in the schools and university further corrupts the values of our society. Arms manufacturers also provide donations to the major political parties, provide positions on company boards and are major funders of a major defence policy institute, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, which is a voice for the US military-Industrial complex and US policy in Australia. The militarisation of society devalues people's lives and is a consequence of the undue influence of the US and their arms manufacturers.

Veterans

Australian participation in US wars has had personal consequences for our troops. Although any sincere justification for our participation in these horrific wars should entail that our troops are respected in a meaningful way and provided for by our society, this is not the experience of many Australian veterans. Instead, the rate of homelessness for veterans is over 2.7 times higher for veterans than the general population³ and the rate of suicidal ideation amongst veterans is also more than double that of the general population.⁴

³https://www.ahuri.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/46540/AHURI-Report_Homelessness-Amongst-Australian-temporary-veterans_Final-Report.pdf

⁴https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/VeteranSuicide/-/media/Committees/fadt_ctte/VeteranSuicide/c03.pdf

Written by:

Seamus Carey is a university student, journalist and activist in working class struggles, peace and international solidarity. Seamus is also a member of the Co-ordinating Committee of IPAN.

Kathryn Kelly has been an environment and peace and social justice activist for many years and is a member of the Co-ordinating Committee of IPAN, as well as being a member of Australian Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN), the Medical Association for Prevention of war (MAPW) and the Coalition of Supporters of Bernard Collaery and Witness K (COSOCK).

Annette Brownlie is a long-time peace activist and has been the Chairperson of the IPAN Co-ordinating Committee since IPAN was established in 2012 and is a member of Just Peace Queensland.

