

I write this at the time of hearing the news of the Taliban capturing Kabul following the troop withdrawal of Afghanistan. After two decades and ten billion dollars of taxpayers' money, we are observing the collapse of our government's efforts and that of the US and its other allies as we wait for further horrors to unfold in the wake of this military failure.

This was a war that was opposed from the start. Our government pursued a US agenda for war in Afghanistan despite mass opposition which resulted in the death of thousands of Afghan civilians and defence personnel. We have seen rising numbers of our returned soldiers with PTSD and recent revelations of a morally corrupt culture in the SAS.

It is time to rethink our foreign policy and learn the lessons from past interventions.

The redistribution of taxpayer money by the government defines our nation's priorities and values. The defense budget now stands at \$45 billion - a 15% increase from last year and 2.1% of GDP.

This expenditure indicates that we value militarism and not peace. We value war and not education and health. We value violence and not our environment. We value threats to our so-called enemies and not the first nations people. We value annihilation and not the present and future generations.

The biennial Talisman Sabre military exercises is another example of our ongoing preparedness to participate in US led wars and acknowledgement that our alliance with the US remains unquestioned. These exercises continue to be provocative in our geopolitical region creating increased tension with our closest trading partner, China, and they adversely contribute to the environment including the World Heritage listed Great Barrier Reef which we already know to be 'in danger'.

As a qualified social worker who has worked in the community and in government organisations I have seen first hand the economic difficulty that people experience in accessing good health services, affordable housing and quality education for their children. An elderly man in my community lives in squalid conditions in a caravan with no electricity having waited over 13 years for social housing which is still yet to materialise due to the high demand and lack of supply in what has been described as a housing emergency by the local mayor.

As a mother I hold concerns about the direction we are moving towards and the legacy we will leave future generations. Peace should be in our grasp. A better world without wars. An economy that is not dependent on the manufacture of weapons or the mineral extractions that comprise them. We have tools at hand to resolve conflicts nonviolently. Power and greed should not determine the 'defence' strategies of nations.

First Nations people are casualties of our wars and war preparations. There has been a long history of the exploitation and abuse of indigenous people. From the genocidal frontier wars to nuclear testing on indigenous lands and the occupation of their lands for bases and war games.

The Darumbal people in the Rockhampton region have limited access to their land and sea because of the Shoalwater Bay Military Training Area. The prized area of their country is this peninsula that once provided hunting grounds and fishing for their people. It has a majestic

alcove with exceptional biodiversity. The base spreads across nearly half a million hectares and hosts rotational military exercises throughout the year. A select number of Darumbal people are granted a few weekends annually to engage in their traditional ways in this space. It is a coming together of families to celebrate culture and tradition. How can their opposition to this occupation be voiced when their limited access to country is so precarious and at the discretion of others?

The presence of the US military along with other allied countries in the Talisman Sabre exercises also poses grave environmental threats. The US defence forces have a poor environmental record of causing pollution and contamination in other countries without remediation. Third party environmental reports and public consultations have since gone by the wayside. Live firing and detonations leave a toxic legacy for the flora and fauna and sonar activity jeopardises the whale migratory patterns. Other environmental impacts are sited here: <https://peaceconvergence.files.wordpress.com/2021/08/2019-master-for-printing-us-bases-in-australia-word-doc-edit.pdf>

Particularly now, in the midst of a pandemic and a global climate crisis, there can be no justification for ongoing investment in war or increased military activity AND First Nations people need to have a significant voice in our foreign policy (and in parliament) as described in the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

This was written on Bundjalung country where sovereignty was never ceded.