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Since WW2, we have been tied to the apron strings of the United States military machine. Before that, it was Britain's apron strings. We have engaged in numerous wars of others' making, and mostly, with little benefit, if any, to our fortuitously placed island nation. We have no natural enemies. Instead of getting involved in others' war, we could focus on peacebuilding within our region.

The ANZUS alliance dating from 1952, doesn't oblige parties to do anything other than meet annually to discuss military and security matters. The United States would not come to our aid if we asked it to, unless it was useful for them to do so. New Zealand had the good sense to withdraw from the alliance in 1985 following ongoing U.S. Navy's refusal to either confirm or deny presence of nuclear weapons on its warships, which frequently visited New Zealand's ports. I wish the Australian government had the good sense to follow suit. but no, we slavishly followed the U.S. into war after war, whether with United Nations endorsement or not.

The latest harrowing iteration of our bowing to U.S influence was the longest and most useless of wars in Afghanistan, where after eighteen long years, our service women and men are left wondering "What was all that effort for?" that is, if they were lucky enough to return home....with suicides and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder rife amongst the serving personnel, as well as a dreadful cloud of possible war crimes hanging over them. This is a horrible legacy for their families too.

To prepare for these almost endless wars, Australia hosts war rehearsals, the most insidious being Talisman Sabre, conducted with up to 30,000 military personnel from a range of countries, which takes place bi-annually off the coast of Queensland, right near our treasured Great Barrier reef. Ship-to-shore, and air-to-land bombings take place with negative impacts on our environment. And as well, the Australian government welcomes U.S. marines to be stationed on a routine rotational basis in Darwin - yes: foreign troops on our soil!

Another aspect of continuing readiness for war is so called "inter-operability" with U.S. military forces. Allies are expected not only to train in war rehearsals, but also to buy, mostly from the United States, the latest military technology and hardware to suit their purposes. The latest iterations of this practice is the much criticised purchase of more than seventy F35 jet fighters, which are totally unnecessary for the defence of Australia, and which have proved so problematical that tests reveal that they cannot fly through an electrical storm, or their fancy computer technology ceases to function (this may have been corrected in the last couple of years). And then there are twelve submarines on order at huge expense to our nation, which will probably be obsolete before they hit the water. We need small, swift patrol boats to patrol our borders, not submarines.

The U.S. bases on our soil as well, scarper any suggestion of sovereignty: Pine Gap, in Australia's living heart, near Alice Springs, is not only a highly technical surveillance operation, but also a strategic enabler of drone strikes, which have become a favoured form of killing enemies. And North-West Cape at Exmouth, is a very-low-frequency transmitter of messages to U.S. submarines, bearing nuclear weapons. Both of these bases are labelled "joint facilities" but both have "Americans only" areas, off-limits to any Australian personnel. I discovered this when in 1985, as an Australian Senator, I sought to visit both bases. At North-West Cape, I was granted a grand tour, which excluded the helix room (secret for Americans only!) In the case of Pine Gap, then Minister for Defence, Kim Beazley, quoted the official secrets act to me, saying that if I went into the base and spoke about its operations I would be put away for a very long time (words to that effect): permission denied. So, in 1987, I was part of a large citizen presence at the gates, and breached the perimeter fence, serving time in gaol for trespassing.

In about 1992, I spoke with former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam about the speech he never delivered on the fateful day of November 11th, 1975, when he was dismissed from office. It is widely held that on that day he had a speech prepared as a statement to the House of Representatives to be delivered after question time, in which he would challenge the presence of Pine Gap on Australian soil, because of its links with the United States Government's capacity for using its technology to launch nuclear weapons, and lamenting the fact that it was run by the Americans for their purposes. Sadly, he denied my request for a copy of that speech - it has never seen the light of day.

To return to British exploitation of our country for military purposes: the nuclear testing programme of the 1960's, left many indigenous people affected by radiation, which still is being experienced two generations later. The tests at Maralinga and Emu Plains in south Australia, and Monte Bello, off the north-west coast, were conducted with the approval of the Australian Prime Minister, and the public was treated to witnessing these tests as something very progressive in the service of humanity! Scant regard was given to the impacts on people living in those areas, which have not been properly de-contaminated to this day.

An independent foreign policy for our country is something I've yearned for over many years. We could be peacebuilders in our region, instead of which, we are seen as toadying to the Americans, often doing their dirty work for them. It is a shameful waste of opportunities for being contributors to human advancement, but the promise of a reasonable development budget by way of the U.N.s seventeen development goals is dismissed in favour of needless expenditure on military hardware, which creates huge volumes of greenhouse emissions as well, to link in another important aspect of wasted opportunities.