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Australia needs independent defence policies from the United States and such policies should include participation from a variety of sectors. It is a perfect time for Australia to take this radical step after the disastrous findings of the Brereton Report. What better time to make an independent stance than after being confronted with the horrors of war that our country has participated in?

Australia's current policy does not provide space for cross-party decision making or for the Australian community to partake in the decision-making process of whether to go to war. The current procedure provides a 'God-like' power to the Prime Minister to decide whether Australia will go to war. Australia's current defence approach is to follow the US into (and out of) wars. Iraq and Afghanistan are two recent examples of Australia's backing of US-led 'wars'. In particular, Afghanistan is a stark example of the damage that results not just from the duration of a war, but the exit of war.

1. The costs and consequences of the US-Australia Alliance relating to First Nations peoples and self-determination rights

There is little needed to say on this matter, as the invasion of countries is a clear breach of First Nations people's rights to self-determination. Iraq and Afghanistan are clear examples. When the US feared 'weapons of mass destruction' in Iraq and wanted to 'combat' terrorism in Afghanistan (both found to be false premises for war), the rights of First Nations peoples in these countries were not considered. War is a colonial construct and the rights or autonomy of First Nations peoples or residents of these countries do not play any role in the decision-making process of the US or Australia.

The environmental impacts of First Nations land and First Nations autonomy in Australia are also greatly impacted by the US-Australia Alliance. Pine Gap, Swan Island, Talisman Sabre are three examples of the US military bases and operations occurring on First Nations land without genuine consent. Not only is native habitat and wildlife disrupted and endangered by the presence of these bases, but the additional use of weapons in these regions further risks the environment and disregards the sacredness of the land.

The fact that 2,200 US Marine troops were able to travel into the Northern Territory earlier this year, despite the high health risk to the First Nations people in the NT, is a clear example of the prioritisation of the US-Australia alliance over the health of Australians, in particular, First Nations people.

It is also important that Australia listen to displaced First Nations people's voices, such as Tamil refugees, Iraqi refugees, Afghan refugees - especially Hazara refugees, Rohingya refugees, Syrian refugees, Palestinian refugees, Somali refugees, Refugees of LGBTQI backgrounds, and Environmental refugees. These voices are of particular importance when it comes to Australia's decisions to maintain connections to governments and militaries involved in wars, civil conflict, and occupations. Australia's exit strategy from Afghanistan did not listen to nor centre the voices of Afghans. Afghan Australians, Afghans seeking asylum in Australia, and the voices of Afghans working with the Australian military were not considered or supported in the exit from Afghanistan.

2. The costs and consequences of the US-Australia Alliance relating to the impact on peace, stability, the rule of law and the lives and wellbeing of civilians in foreign countries affected by Australian participation in US-led wars.

The Afghan war started on the grounds of collective punishment; a war crime. Australia needs policies in place that do not allow for Australia to partake in wars premised on war crimes.

After 20 years of the Afghan war, Australian troops have withdrawn from Afghanistan. US-Taliban 'peace talks' occurred before this exit, however, no adequate or realistic support or guidance has been provided by Australia in this exit strategy. Despite the wealth of knowledge of the risks that Afghan communities, especially Hazara people, will face in the aftermath of this war, Australia has left the country in full awareness of the likelihood that the Taliban will take over most parts of Afghanistan. Considering Australia went to Afghanistan to 'combat' terrorism, the fact that it does not seriously consider the risks that Afghans now face is absurd and shameful. Not all foreign troops have left Afghanistan, yet the Taliban already control a significant portion of Afghanistan and additional areas are highly contested between the Taliban and Afghan forces. This is extremely concerning and highlights the serious risk Afghans will face once all troops are gone.

Australia has played an integral role in the destruction of the Afghan land, property and the environment, the murder of civilians, the destruction of security, order, and social cohesion, and has left the country with a stronger Taliban presence.

3. The costs and consequences of the US-Australia Alliance relating to the impact of US bases and troops deployments in tying Australia to US strategic interests, including a nuclear war-fighting posture, and undermining Australian independence.

Growing up in Alice Springs I was aware of the presence of Pine Gap base from a young age and the risks that it imposed on the community. Being one of the US's five eyes and potentially the US's most strategic base outside of its country, Pine Gap puts the community of Alice Springs and the broader Arrernte region at great risk of attack, including nuclear attack. This is a significant risk that the community faces in which no community consultation was held nor transparency provided to the country about the role of Pine Gap.

As mentioned above, the risk to the NT community with the arrival of 2,200 troops to Darwin during covid is a recent risk that prioritised the US military needs over the health and welfare of First Nations Territorians and other Territorians. The NT had very strong border restrictions and has maintained tight border control during outbreaks across the nation, preventing family interstate or NT resident's interstate from returning home at different periods. Yet, US Marine troops have been allowed in.

4. Recommendations

4.1. The priorities and future objectives of Australian foreign policy:

A) Australia needs to develop defence policies and procedures that enforce the following considerations when deciding whether to go to war:

- * Rights and obligations under international human rights law;
- * Rights and obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and
- * To ensure that the basis for going to war is not under the premises of war crimes (e.g. beginning a war based on collective punishment).

B) Australia needs to ensure its defence strategy aligns with the Australian communities' values, expectations and needs when it comes to legitimate defence. The Iraq war is a clear example of when the Australian community did not agree with the Government's decision to start or go to war. These moments of mass movements and opposition to war need to be actively considered in the decision-making process.

C) Australia needs to ensure that we are not entering wars just to ensure the US-Australia Alliance is strong. This is not a reason to go to war.

This is not prioritising the safety or wellbeing of Australians.

4.2. Proposed changes in the relationship with the US:

A) Australia needs to actively change its relationship with the US to one that allows for disagreement and refusal of entering wars regardless of the US's position.

B) Australia needs to critically reconsider its current agreement to host Marine troops in the Northern Territory and the presence of Pine Gap in Alice Springs based on the safety and health of Australians.

C) Australia needs to reconsider all the current US bases and the presence of US troops in Australia. This should be done with consideration of the Australian public's opinions and concerns.