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The Australia-US alliance has resulted in decisions by Australian Governments led by both major parties that were and are directly counter to the economic, foreign policy, and democratic interests of Australia and its people. As a major global superpower of the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the interests of the United States of America has dominated the foreign and domestic policy of the relatively tiny Commonwealth of Australia increasingly since WWII.

## Defense spending

The US places significant political pressure on its allies, including Australia, to commit to spending a minimum of 2% of GDP on defense every year. In Australia, both major parties have committed to meet this target, with the defense budget for 2021 totaling **44.62 billion**<sup>1</sup>. Divided among the 25.36 million people living in Australia this amounts to approximately \$1,745.26 of tax payer money per person per year or **\$33.56** per week. This comes at the significant opportunity cost of alternative spending on things like healthcare and education. For example, if redirected the Australian defense budget could run 39,472 ICU beds in Australian hospitals<sup>2</sup>, or pay 611,613 teachers<sup>3</sup>. I for one am certainly unwilling to spend \$33.56 dollars a week of my taxpayer money on weapons and military infrastructure (which is often intended primarily for use by US armed forces) and I'm sure many other Australians would agree with me. However, the voting public is not given a choice in the matter due the bipartisan agreement on military spending brought about in no small part by pressure from the US government and US military corporations.

## Foreign policy

Australia's close ties to the US has dictated our approach to foreign policy and relationship to other countries for decades. In the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century alone, Australia has been dragged into protracted wars in Iraq and Afghanistan which have been estimated to cost \$5 billion and \$10 billion dollars in total<sup>4,5</sup>, respectively, not to mention the 47 Australian casualties between the two wars<sup>6</sup>. In the past 10 to 15 years or so, there has been a shift in US foreign policy on the Republic of China (RoC), which is now regarded as a threat to US economic and military superiority. As a result, there has been a commensurate change in the attitudes of Australian politicians from viewing China as an important strategic trading partner (c.f. Kevin Rudd's Labor Government) to all but accusing China of Imperialist invasions of surrounding nations and releasing the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus into the world under Scott Morrison's Coalition government. This change in attitude is has been significantly driven by lobbying from the US State Department and American companies like Raytheon and Lockheed Martin, who are major sources of funding for organisations like the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) which directly advises Australian politicians and the Australian Department of Defense<sup>7</sup>.

A major impact on Australian people and businesses has resulted from this change in attitude towards China. Following restrictions on Chinese investment in Australia and statements from the Australian government on China and the COVID-19 pandemic, the RoC has retaliated with several rounds of tariffs and/or restrictions on Australian goods including wine, barley, coal, lobsters, timber, red meat and cotton. It makes very little sense for Australia to antagonise the RoC in this way, given its importance as a trading partner and relative location and military superiority. In this way, the US-Australian alliance has directly and negatively impacted the Australian economy and the lives of its citizens.

## The erosion of Australian democracy

The bipartisan support for current levels of defense spending and the US-Australian alliance has left Australians with no legitimate recourse to decide how much money to spend on weapons and military infrastructure and who (if anyone) to be pointing those weapons at. At present, the only people who need to be involved in the decision to send Australia to war are the Prime Minister and Defense Minister. In my opinion the decision of two people should not, in a democratic nation of over 25 million, be enough to spend Australian dollars and lives on wars, especially when those wars are largely fought on the basis of the interests of the United States. Some, including Australians for War Powers Reform, have suggested that all deployments of Australian troops be opened up to parliamentary scrutiny and debate, however the bipartisan support of the US alliance could here again prevent democratic representation of the Australian people in this decision-making process. Introducing structural changes to the Australian constitution to include direct voting on drastic matters such as war could result in a more democratic decision-making process, especially in cases where Australia is not one of the major players in the conflict. Such a system could potentially be applied to decisions about defense spending in general in order to swing the balance of power from special interest groups to the voting public. For example, direct plebiscites on incremental changes to the defense budget could be held every 2-5 years, with debate to guide voters in their decision making. This would give Australian voters a direct say in how much of their taxpayer money is spent on defense. However, such systemic changes designed to separate Australian interests from US ones would be difficult to achieve. The last time an Australian Prime Minister attempted to reduce the US military presence on Australian soil, there was a flurry of communications from the CIA calling Gough Whitlam a security risk in his own country and his Labor government was ousted by the Governor General in favour of the much more pro-US Fraser government soon after. Since then, no Labor party has dared make the US alliance and Australian independence an election issue, meaning Australians have had no choice in the matter for over 45 years.

It seems obvious to me that outside of the opponents of the United States, the Commonwealth of Australia has no real enemies in the Asia-Pacific region or globally. Far more public discussion on the costs and consequences of the Australia-US alliance, and a shift to a more independent Australia which acts in its own interests, as dictated by democratic decisions, is necessary to avoid further harm to the Australian people, and to avoid the catastrophe that is war.

## Endnotes

- 1: <https://www.australiandefence.com.au/defence/budget-policy/2021-defence-budget-at-a-glance#:~:text=The%20headline%20figure%20for%20this,2.1%20per%20cent%20of%20GDP.>
- 2: <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2019/211/7/financial-cost-intensive-care-australia-multicentre-registry-study>
- 3: [https://www.payscale.com/research/AU/Job=High\\_School\\_Teacher/Salary](https://www.payscale.com/research/AU/Job=High_School_Teacher/Salary)
- 4: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian\\_contribution\\_to\\_the\\_2003\\_invasion\\_of\\_Iraq](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian_contribution_to_the_2003_invasion_of_Iraq)
- 5: <https://www.smh.com.au/national/was-it-worth-it-the-positives-and-negatives-of-australia-s-war-in-afghanistan-20210416-p57jur.html>
- 6: [https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/war\\_casualties](https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/war_casualties)
- 7: <https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/ad-aspi/2021-03/ASPI%20by%20the%20numbers%2019-20.pdf?7zWjITgji6uCH5SOC14LFLjAcsyOckue=>