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SUBMISSION TO

IPAN

Independent and Peaceful Australia Network

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

What are the alternatives?

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Introduction

This submission to the IPAN (Independent and Peaceful Australia Network) Inquiry is presented on behalf of the Josephite Justice Network, a ministry of the Congregations of the Sisters of St Joseph. The Sisters of St Joseph and our Associates (numbering approximately three thousand women and men) were founded in the mid-nineteenth century by Mary MacKillop and Julian Tenison Woods to work with those suffering from poverty and social disadvantage. We serve, educate, advocate and work for justice, for earth and for people, and especially for those pushed to the margins of our world.

We share IPAN's concerns regarding the costs and consequences of Australia's involvement in US-led wars and the US Alliance. Thank you for this opportunity to make a submission.

Australian dependence on the United States

The influence of American film, television, pop culture and music on Australians is widespread and has been so for many years. This imitation of American ideals and practices is reflected and bolstered by Australian governments which have traditionally looked to the US for protection, and in return have given unwavering military support. Australia has been a willing combatant with the US in every war since World War II—Korea, Vietnam, the Middle East.

It is generally believed that the ANZUS Treaty with the US guarantees American assistance to Australia should there be need. But the Treaty does not expressly state this, and leaves the likelihood of [action on our behalf](#) in time of war very open indeed.

The matter of Australia's relationship with its close regional neighbour Timor-Leste is a prime example of the dominance of the United States on Australian foreign policy. Loud Australian claims of "loyalty to mates", championing of the battler", and "friend of the under-dog" are undermined by decades of deeply flawed treatment of the Timorese people. A major contributor to that treatment is dependence on the United States, as American desires contributed to the Australian betrayal of the Timorese people during the Indonesian invasion of Portuguese Timor and the 24-year brutal occupation that followed. The spectre of communism was used by Indonesia as a pretext for invading the eastern side of Timor, a move which had the approval of President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Grotesquely, a visit by these two coincided with Indonesia's invasion plans, so they suggested that the date of the invasion be changed from 6th to 7th December 1975, to allow them time to return to the US. Indonesian complied, meekly supported by Australia.

Australia's own fear of offending Indonesia flowed from its desire to support US foreign policy. Successive Australian governments, both Coalition and Labor, acquiesced to the 24-year Indonesian regime in East Timor in lock-step with the US, neither doing anything

substantial towards the final Timorese independence. It was the death of the long-reigning dictator Suharto coupled with Indonesia's woes during the Asian financial collapse that were the major catalysts for change. This abandonment of the Timorese people occurred despite the extraordinary loyalty of the Timorese towards Australian soldiers in World War II. Many a returned soldier said they owed their lives to the Timorese. The death toll of the Timorese as a result of their assistance was at least 40,000 as a direct result of Japanese reprisals and Allied bombing.

Despite this unique contribution to the Australian war effort, the Timorese were forgotten when they faced further danger. Had the US championed the Timorese as Indonesia invaded in 1975, Australia would have assisted. Every Prime Minister and government from 1975-1999 supported Indonesia because the US did. The fact that Australia could ignore the plight of a near neighbour for so long is an indictment of its American-dominated foreign policy. The saga of the Australian relationship with Timor-Leste is a warning to our regional neighbours. It is clear that Australian commitment to human rights is not an end in itself: it is only important insofar as it serves the relationship with the US.

The current forays of both the US and Australia into the Pacific in matters of development aid and COVID support are commendable. However, the Australian aid budget was markedly decreased in recent years, so the sudden reversal towards assistance suggests that concern for regional development runs a bad second to the desire to counter China's growing influence. This mirrors the increasing US military presence in the Asia-Pacific area in its efforts to thwart Chinese designs on the region.

It was a regenerated Malcolm Fraser who, in his book *[Dangerous Allies](#)*, advised that Australia should break its alliance with the US. He stated that 'strategic dependence is no longer in Australia's best interests.' (p. 212). Yet Australia's dependence on the US remains immense, as shown in the use of Australian territory for the US satellite surveillance facility at Pine Gap near Darwin, and in the US marine base, also in Darwin. Australia's ready support of the ultimately useless US wars in the Middle East are all the more controversial as they were undertaken without parliamentary debate. Australian governments cling to a place in the orbit of the dangerous American strategy for maintaining its sway. Consequently, [Australia itself could be the target](#) of any future adversary.

Past ambivalence towards Asia continues to be manipulated by Australian governments. Constant recourse to the concept of "national security" by governments stokes fear and thus feeds the case for ever-increasing dependence on the US.

Manufacture and Sale of Weapons

Accompanying the supine dependence on the US, Australia has also decided to aim for a place among the top 10 global arms manufacturers. This ambition is well on the way to fulfilment, the outcome of which may well be windfalls of billions of dollars for the Australian economy, but is just as assuredly the cause of increasing human suffering, and a threat to Australian safety.

In 2019-20, it was estimated that the value of [Australian defence export permits](#) had ballooned to \$5.2 billion, up from \$1.5 billion in 2017-18. Defence products, technology and services are made for export by many small Australian businesses. The government is eager to promote this

lucrative industry which manufactures arms and ammunition, robotics, drones, armoured vehicles, electronic warfare systems.

Melissa Price MP, Minister for Defence Industry released the [Australian Defence Sales Catalogue in 2020](#), saying: “We believe the products and services featured here will meet key capability requirements of our friends and partners across the world.” However, ironically, the “friends and partners” include countries that are politically insecure, with populations suffering from armed conflict, displacement and violence. Among them are Sudan, the Central African Republic, Belarus, Mali, Somalia, and Congo. Each of these nations experience high levels of ongoing crisis. Australia also [refuses to stop](#) selling arms to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, both of which are aggressors against Yemen, producing a vast humanitarian disaster of violence, starvation and death. Thus the Australian determination to profit from weapons of war involves every Australian, and makes every Australian government complicit in the deaths of innocent civilians. We may not all be guilty of these decisions, but we bear responsibility.

The Australian government publishes claims that international obligations, human rights, and regional security are concerns in its governance of defence exports. However, what has not been published are details of sales to individual countries since 2004. This means that Australian population is denied [critical specific information](#) on how and where Australian-made weapons are being used.

The Australia openness to war is designed to retain US favour. The Australian manufacture and sale of weapons is designed for profit. Both of these realities are successful in their aims, but both also reduce Australian independence, contribute to human suffering worldwide, and make Australia a more likely target of future revengeful aggression.

Alternatives

As with all countries Australia’s history is dependent on its geography. The history of white settlement shows an Australia dependent on distant Britain and then on the US while attempting to evade the nearer Asia and the Pacific.

Regional acts of independence are exemplary for Australia. New Zealand’s refusal to accommodate US nuclear submarines under Prime Minister David Lange in 1984 was an example of what is possible. The courage of certain Pacific nations in opposing Indonesia over the West Papua issues shows that independence is not necessarily the preserve of the wealthy and the strong.

ASEAN Membership may or may not eventuate for Australia, although strong trade and diplomacy links have existed for decades. However, Australia’s future must involve the strengthening of relationships with the nations of the Pacific. These links must be based on mutual respect, necessitating a successful shedding by Australia of notions of superiority. Nations in the region must expend efforts to understand and learn from each other, meaning that Australians need to be open to appreciating the cultures and sense of community evident in the smaller island nations. Diplomacy based on truth, honour and a desire for mutual advancement would renounce exploitation.

Such a future for Australia would require a rejuvenation of the Australian political system. The influence of big business on government would need to be curtailed, ensuring that regional relationships are based on the good of people rather than the financial gain of corporations or

political aspirations within Australia. In particular, independent oversight of Australian governance is imperative. A body with the powers of a standing Royal Commission is now necessary to oversee internal Australian matters, an essential task if Australia is ever to gain the trust of the region and form enduring and mutually beneficial partnerships.

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