

VINTAGE REDS OF THE CANBERRA REGION

SUBMISSION TO THE IPAN INQUIRY

OVERVIEW

The Vintage Reds of the Canberra Region is pleased to have the opportunity to make this submission to the IPAN Inquiry exploring the case for an Independent and Peaceful Australia.

We are a group of retired union members and activists who believe in the principles of trade unionism: fairness, equity, social and economic justice and peace.

We are active in campaigning for social improvement and progressive political advances.

History has shown that there can be no peace without justice.

We embrace international solidarity of all working people (that is, the vast majority of people on this planet).

Our lived experience has taught us that war is not a viable option for the resolution of disputes and conflict.

Great power alliances pose an existential threat to life on earth and increase the chance of catastrophic war.

Abatement of catastrophic climate change is an urgent priority.

War preparations are a dangerous and counterproductive distraction.

Australia must never wage war without a majority vote of Parliament.

Australia has a practical and moral imperative to be independent and peaceful in making our path through a complex, modern world.

As a nation we have much that we could contribute to the benefit of the world through diplomacy and peacemaking, international co-operation, disarmament and alleviation of poverty, disease and suffering.

CORE ISSUES

Unions and Workers' Rights

One of the finest institutions to emerge out of the Industrial Revolution is the trade union movement with its primary purpose of establishing and securing the rights and living standards of working families. There is no other movement that focuses entirely on the economic and material advancement of ordinary people.

But it does more than that. The underlying and universal principles of equity and solidarity promote ongoing campaigning to secure what makes life worthwhile and meaningful – education, health care and security. These objectives require political rights to facilitate democratic control of our collective social future.

The movement is international in nature, and struggles for democratic control of the economic structures that underpin human activity. There has never been a more pressing need for democratic control of the economy as irreversible climate change caused by industrial activity threatens to

overwhelm human civilisation. It is simply unsustainable that a handful of powerful men and their corporate entities make decisions about life and death over billions of their fellow human beings and all other life forms on the planet.

As progressive retired trade unionists, with political memories that stretch back to our families' involvement in the First World War, we recognise that economic and trade tensions between nations can, and have, led to catastrophic wars over resources and territory.

The Great War ("to end all war") was a battle between imperial European powers and had nothing to do with the advancement of human need or social progress. Millions died and were maimed in a conflict initiated and controlled by powerful elites. Jingoistic nationalism shattered international solidarity between workers.

In Australia, trade unions took an active role in two referendums to defeat the conscription of unwilling young men into the conflict on the Western Front.

The Second World War in Europe can properly be thought of as a continuation of the First, but with even more advanced weapons of destruction. Our fathers participated as soldiers, and our mothers as nurses, in the war against fascism in Europe or in the Pacific against the imperial Japanese forces. For the first and only time since British colonisation/conquest of Australia the continental integrity of Australia was seen to be threatened.

Three significant changes arose from this conflict. Australia was industrialised in a unionised workforce increasing the bargaining power of labour *vis à vis* capital. Australia abandoned its attachment to the British for its "defence" and embraced an alliance with the United States. The United States used nuclear weapons against civilian targets to bring an end to the war against Japan.

The US-Australia alliance was formalised in 1952 and now, greatly enhanced, has more fearsome weapons of mass destruction and belligerence towards perceived rivals.

Currently the union movement and its capacity to defend and extend the rights of workers is much reduced. This development, wholly unwelcome, has much to do with the domination of our economic and political life by the United States.

At Federation, Australia was innovative and progressive in adopting "conciliation and arbitration" in industrial disputes. This led to the universal regulation of minimum rates of pay and working conditions. Compulsory arbitration set and enforced fair conditions of work. The harsh "marketplace" for labour was curtailed. The normal operation of free markets, where the price was determined by supply and demand, was limited. Our society was notable for its embrace of "a fair go" and an egalitarian ethos that contributed much to social harmony. Unions were critical to this social progress.

Even with respect to the two great blemishes on our "national project", rights of First Nations peoples and women's rights, trade unions played important and meaningful roles at the forefront of the struggle for justice.

By contrast with Australia, the history of labour relations and social equity in the USA leaves much to be desired. We do not propose to review the lamentable history of the repression of American unions. Suffice to say that the struggle for fair rates of pay and conditions of work has been met with by force and the determination by bosses to exclude unions from the workplace, society or politics. Outside observers look on at the disharmony and unfairness of US society with despair.

American corporations dominate Australia's economy. The American military dominates our "defence" thinking. American elites dominate our politics.

From the 1980s under Hawke Labor (and intensified under the Liberals) we have succumbed to US-style industrial relations whereby unions are weakened and marginalised. “Bargaining” at the enterprise level has replaced the ability of unions to campaign across industries and act in the interest of an entire class of workers. Compulsory arbitration has all but been abandoned except for the repression of strike activity in “essential” industries. State intervention and regulation of labour has been wound back in a manner that facilitates the structural exploitation of workers. Wage theft has become a normal business model. The employee/employer relationship has been broken down into precarious arrangements of contracting out, casual, and self employment (often sham arrangements designed to reduce the bargaining power of workers).

Harsh and repressive laws have been enacted to break the power of strong and well organised unions.

The share of GDP held by capital is at historic highs and the ability of unions to fight back is at historic lows. The long-term consequence of this disproportionate power distribution will be reflected in the structure of our society. We will be more unfair. Life will be more difficult for working families. Social benefits will be wound back. We will be more like America.

Our elites are so close to the US that we must call out the obvious: it is a foreign power and its interests are not necessarily ours.

Economic

Much of our prosperity (which has papered over the negative impact of US-style labour relations) is due to the export of vast mountains of minerals to China. The rise of China as an industrial powerhouse saw the destruction of much of the manufacturing capacity of Australia. Bosses exported Australian jobs, seeing the opportunity to make higher profits by reducing labour costs. Private profit ached public good. We are now a mine and a quarry and a farm and a port. We were also a university.

These critical economic activities are under threat from the US-inspired war of words against China which may very quickly become a real war. China is our most important trading partner and the deterioration of relationships may cause devastating economic pain.

Again, it's well to call out: we did not initiate the cold war with China. We are merely following President Obama's “Pacific Pivot”, amplified by President Trump and now mirrored by President Biden.

What vital national interest of ours is threatened by China that warrants us jeopardising our economic stability? The elite, pro-American class that dominates Australian policy needs to think carefully about a change of direction. There is a political and geographic imperative. China and Australia are entities in close proximity. The continents will not drift apart. We are in it for the long term.

Having switched our dependence from the British to the Americans, with barely a backwards glance, we are lazy in our relations with our neighbours. We do not try much to cultivate understanding because ultimately, we are “protected” by the American nuclear umbrella.

There is evidence that China is now capable of outclassing US forces in proximity to its own territory. Where the US has superiority is in nuclear weapons. Are our elites really contemplating as a viable defence policy a nuclear war to contain China?

In concluding our comments on the economic aspects of the alliance we make three points. Firstly (with our manufacturing capacity gutted) we have little chance of succeeding in a sustained conflict. Military might lies in economic capacity. We can't even make a car. Secondly, as we are locked into close integration with the American military, most of our considerable military purchases are made at extortionate cost from the US military industrial complex. Thirdly, and most sobering, if war with China goes nuclear, by accident or design, there is no economy in a dead planet.

Aside from these terrifying forebodings, we make the sad observation: every dollar spent on our current "defence" strategy is a dollar less to spend on health, education and welfare, here domestically, or abroad, on foreign aid for humanitarian purposes.

American capitalism has become increasingly rapacious in the last 50 years and the social gains of the New Deal wound back as jobs have been exported to low cost countries and union organisation stymied. The American "middle class" has been hollowed out as wages have been held to poverty levels for millions of workers. It is impossible to justify the US billionaire "plutocracy" that exists now in which wealth never "trickles down" and taxes are never paid.

The same grossly exploitative economics of "neo liberalism" are being implemented in Australia. Why would we wish to follow that path?

One of the mechanisms used to "integrate" our economy into the US model of a worldwide competitive market economy has been the implementation of free trade agreements. These generally have clauses that allow corporations to sue sovereign governments for loss of profit opportunity when decisions are made in the public interest, but not in the corporations'. These private "arbitration" mechanisms undermine national independence and allow multinational corporations to attack social and economic gains made by workers.

The power of US economic interests and its leadership of the international capitalist order is never more apparent than the mining industries' scandalous political campaign against paying additional "resource rent" taxation.

Off shore tax havens utilized by multinationals allow for the minimisation, or total avoidance of tax on economic activity within our borders.

What hope do we have as an independent country to maintain and improve our collective wellbeing when we suffer under a "dictatorship of capital" in an unjust and increasingly exploitative world order?

Environment and Climate Change

Many of us came of age in the Vietnam era with the news media filled with reports and images of destruction. We saw widespread bombing, napalming and defoliation. There was a slogan used by the opponents of that war, "War Is Not Healthy For People And Other Living Things". Never has there been a truer slogan.

It has been obvious for a long time that our human ingenuity has produced weapons with increasingly destructive capacity. We can now destroy life on earth many times over.

As previously noted, China is the *bête noire* and America's enemy number one because it is outperforming the US economically and is claimed to pose a threat to a world "rules-based order". China challenges America's global control. There are dozens of countries and governments in the 20th century that attracted American wrath and were demolished by invasion or subversion. Each invasion left its mark on the environment.

The real existential threat at the moment is anthropogenic climate change. Never has there been a greater challenge to our species' survival, or a greater need for human cooperation and rapid radical action.

The tired “cold war” shibboleths that lambast the undemocratic, one-party state in China are a distraction. China does not threaten the territorial integrity of the United States. Nor does it threaten the territorial integrity of Australia. But the US military industrial complex continues like an unstoppable war machine.

Australia does not restrict itself to defence against invasion. Nor does the United States, a country that has been almost perpetually at war since its foundation. Aggressive war on foreign soil remains a favoured policy option. Given past human behaviour it seems reasonable to conclude that sooner or later we will slide into the abyss again. Things tend to escalate with war, to secure victory or avoid defeat. We slip into savagery. No atrocity is unthinkable.

Nuclear bombs are weapons of mass destruction designed to obliterate cities. People. Civilians. Non combatants *en masse*.

War has a massive and deleterious impact on the environment. War in the nuclear age threatens a catastrophic nuclear winter.

We have the strongest view that the only way forward for Australia is to break from all foreign military alliances and cultivate peaceful and constructive relations with our neighbours.

For rational, as well as moral reasons, we believe that war is no longer a viable option as a national strategy except in direct defence of our landmass.

On a concluding note on the environment we observe that for First Nations peoples, sovereignty has never been ceded over their own land. We took their land by force in the frontier wars ranging over a century. Perhaps this is why we are so insecure that we cling to the US alliance despite its incursions on our independence and sovereignty. Foreign military bases and military exercises trash Aboriginal land. In the event of war with China escalating to a nuclear exchange it will possibly be a “hard rain” falling on Aboriginal land at Pine Gap, North West Cape and Darwin where US bases are located.

Impact on First Nations’ Peoples

The ANZUS Alliance dates from 1952, nearly seventy years ago. It bound Australia, New Zealand and the US to consult in cases of imminent attack on any one of the parties. New Zealand has since withdrawn from its alliance with the US.

ANZUS was conceived during the confected Cold War, which began after the defeat of Germany. Russia, previously our ally, suddenly became our enemy, and so did China in 1949, when the PLA defeated the nationalist troops.

In Europe, the Iron Curtain descended and this supposedly posed a threat to Western Europe, although the USSR was in no position to attack.

With regard to Asia, the US developed the Domino Theory, by which south east Asian nations would one by one, like a deck of cards, fall victim to the Red Peril, until eventually the red plague reached Australia.

Some see ANZUS as a reward for Australia's support of the US in the Korean War.

It was the beginning of Australia's subservient involvement in a long litany of offensive US military operations against nations or groups which posed no threat to any of the ANZUS members. These wars have cost the Australian economy billions. Many people have died, and others, including returned indigenous personnel, have suffered horrendous physical and mental illness as a result. They still struggle with the Australian government for support to transition to civilian life.

Any financial benefits of these imperial wars accrue solely to the United States, through profits for its armaments industry and access to resources.

There are two official US bases in Australia, the naval base at Exmouth in Western Australia, and the far more controversial Pine Gap, near Alice Springs, which began to operate in 1970. It was built on Arrente land. However, the Arrente people were never consulted.

Pine Gap was originally represented to the wider Australian public as a joint US Australian space research station. It has since developed into an intelligence gathering centre, and in recent years has assisted the US to carry out surveillance in foreign countries, and direct drone strikes and assassinations in non-enemy countries. This makes Australia complicit in breaches of international law.

Prime Minister Gough Whitlam is reputed to be the first Australian Prime Minister to advocate for indigenous Australians and to listen respectfully to their concerns. He had grave reservations about what was really going on at Pine Gap. After some investigation, he was scheduled to brief the Australian people about the base on 11 November 1975. By an extraordinary coincidence, Whitlam was dismissed on that very day by the Governor General, Sir John Kerr. He never got the chance to tell Australians what was really going on at Pine Gap.

Of course, Whitlam's dismissal was a great blow to the advancement of indigenous Australians.

A major role of Pine Gap is to alert the US government about possible missile strikes directed at North America, triggering a defensive response. It is obvious that if hostilities were to break out, Pine Gap would be a prime target for destruction by enemy forces. This would cause massive casualties in Alice Springs and surrounding indigenous settlements. Many in those communities also lost family and kin when our former imperial ally, Great Britain, nuked them at Maralinga. Some are still suffering the effects of radiation induced birth defects.

With regard to the US marines in Darwin, there have been allegations of sexual abuse of local women. It was reported by the ABC in 2018 that police investigations into these sex crimes had been shelved. Apparently, some of the women had withdrawn their complaints. It was widely believed that the US and Australian authorities had placed the smooth running of the alliance ahead of justice for these women. We do not know how many of the victims were indigenous. However, because of widespread disadvantage, indigenous women are particularly vulnerable. For evidence of violence including rape and murder by US military, we can look at the history of sexual violence by US military personnel against local women in the Philippines, Korea and above all in Okinawa. Sadly, there are few prosecutions.

It should be understood that the black letter versions of ANZUS and other alliances are not really key to the way they operate in practice. Because of the huge power imbalance between Great Britain in the past and the US today, Australia strives to gain favour from its imperial masters by demonstrating the utmost compliance in defence and related matters, hoping thereby to secure protection against some future threat.

In summary, there are several threats to indigenous communities from the ANZUS treaty:

- Loss of access to traditional lands taken over for use by foreign military.
- Threat of violence or sexual assault by foreign military, especially in Darwin
- Risk of physical and psychological damage through overseas deployment in unnecessary conflicts
- Post service trauma and neglect
- Danger from military strikes targeted on bases in remote areas with indigenous populations
- Theoretically, the diversion of funds which could be used to support communities.

Society and Community

The United States has a vibrant and engaging culture in art, music, theatre, literature, architecture; film etc. that many Australians enjoy, but it has a dark side and does not reflect our social and community values. The US tends to elevate individualism above collective values. So, for instance in the US, there is a rudimentary patchwork of public healthcare but systems of private profit come foremost. Australians have a longer tradition of “mateship” and the concept of “a fair go”. Over the years we have developed a comprehensive social welfare system to prevent the frail, the aged or the needy falling through the cracks. It is an incomplete project that needs proper planning, innovation and funding (and is under challenge by US profit seeking corporations).

Unfortunately, US cultural influences are undermining our core values. Popular films from Hollywood (some with military and CIA support) often promote war, racist attitudes and in some cases justify torture. This is apparent from attitudes to Muslims, and more recently Chinese and Asians in Australia.

Our mainstream media (a substantial portion owned by Murdoch, a US citizen) is often complicit in promoting American obsessions and peddling disinformation. The “war on terror” and the invasion of Iraq (based on false evidence of weapons of mass destruction) and Afghanistan (where a limited action against al Qaeda would have sufficed) is an example where the media failed to report fairly and honestly.

Our universities were designed to work in ways where research and learning ended up in the public domain to advance the knowledge shared by all humankind. The US desire to prevent China from becoming a leader in several areas has led to restrictions on research co-operation and engagement of academic researchers. Universities are cutting back on Asian study and languages. While promoting the idea of open trade and engagement we are closing down avenues to greater understanding.

Militarization is becoming a pervasive part of our life. Arms manufacturers (many US owned) are buying influence by employing ex politicians, allocating scholarships and funding think tanks that boost war as a means to resolve international disputes.

It seems that our once esteemed diplomatic corps skills and expertise to work through international institutions for peace and human progress, now take second fiddle to the drive to corral a “grand coalition” of European nations (NATO) and Asian, Pacific and Indian nations against China.

The US is pressuring its allies to spend 2% GDP on weapons and military preparations. Every dollar spent is at the cost of our capacity to address sorely needed social programs to benefit the health, welfare, education of our people, including First Nations who cry out for justice and reparations.

Our social cohesion is eroded by US based and owned social media which is providing a highway for crackpot ideas that are incubated in the peculiar culture of US society. Most recently we see the madness of organised resistance to public health measures to limit the spread of COVID 19 including vaccination. We see at work the toxic mix of “freedom” advocates, rightwing Christian believers (blood of Christ will save you) and deranged conspiracy nuts. Previously, we saw the prominence of “Blue Lives Matter” racism, ‘Nuke Mecca’ anti-mosques activism and anti-Muslim terrorism.

We need to focus on efforts to counter these corrosive ideas that undermine our “old school” social and community values, not be sidetracked by a concerted campaign by politicians, public servants, the military and the media to engender fear of China.

Regrettably, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks we followed the US lead and became fearful and antagonistic towards others. We departed from humanitarian past practice and Australia now treats the victims of war and oppression who have arrived by boat as refugees and asylum seekers with abominable cruelty. This is especially regrettable when the refugees come from countries in which Australia has waged war. We lock them up, sometimes indefinitely, inflicting severe privations resulting in serious deterioration in their physical and mental health. We separate family members and deliberately transfer detainees to avoid contact with lawyers and the media. We often return them to their country of origin despite clear threats to their lives and freedom. We even appear to be tardy or negligent in granting access visas to the Afghan interpreters who assisted in our engagement. At the same time, we grant citizenship to foreign nationals who are wealthy enough to "invest" a million or two in a business activity. In blunt terms, we shamefully sell our citizenship to the rich, and persecute the needy.

Military and Defence

For its entire history Australia has relied on powerful friends for its national security and for guidance on foreign policy priorities, a “strategic dependence”. From our earliest days, through both World Wars, successive Australian governments allowed Britain to be the final arbiter of Australia’s foreign and security policy. Britain set Empire policy, with the power to take Australia to wars that resulted in high economic costs and an enormous number of deaths and casualties. In return Australia expected the Empire to spring to its defence, if needed.

However, when Australia was threatened during World War II the Empire was unable to support us and Australia appealed to the US for assistance. From this point Australia shifted its strategic dependence. The ANZUS Treaty is often cited as the basis of our defence alliance with the US. But this is an unusually weak Treaty which provides no guarantees that the US would respond to threats to Australia.

In the absence of these guarantees Australia has constantly sought to demonstrate its loyalty to its alliance with the US – an alliance which has cost Australia dearly both financially and in lives lost; and these costs are now escalating rapidly. Australia has followed the US into illegal wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. Now there are concerns that Australia might follow the US into an armed conflict with China.

Australia's current defence policy is spelt out in the 2016 Defence White Paper, the 2020 Defence Strategic Update and the 2020 Force Structure Plan.

This Paper stresses that, "An important part of the Government's strategy is to continue to strengthen our alliance with the United States, as well as our other regional and international partnerships, to meet shared security challenges such as the pervasive threat of terrorism." It is ironic that this was an objective when the US had just elected President Trump who had emphasised his America First policy and demonstrated a lack of commitment to many US alliances.

This paper also signalled that Australia intended to rapidly increase its Defence Budget. It states, "The Government will fund the White Paper goals by increasing the defence budget to two per cent of Australia's Gross Domestic Product by 2020–21, providing an unprecedented investment in Australia's defence capability of approximately \$195 billion over ten years."

The 2020 Defence Strategic Update and the 2020 Force Structure Plan, released on 1 July 2020, outlined a new strategy for Defence and the capability investments to deliver it.

The Strategic Update claims to set, "A new strategic policy framework to ensure Australia is able – and is understood as willing – to deploy military power to shape our environment, deter actions against our interests and, when required, respond with military force." The content and tone of this document signals a much more aggressive approach. The rapid ramping up of defence expenditure and the hostile rhetoric, promoted by the US and clearly directed at China, are cause for concern if not alarm.

What are the Implications of the Closer Alliance with the United States on our Defence Policy?

Loss of National Sovereignty

Australia lost national sovereignty in foreign affairs and defence policies when it allowed the US to maintain military and communications bases here. The presence of foreign bases and troops almost invariably leads to increased foreign interference in the internal affairs of the country and a loss of independence. In the worst cases it can lead to military coups, economic deterioration and a loss of democratic government. The Philippines experience provides a salutary example.

Following the dismissal of the Whitlam Government in 1975 all the major political parties, including Labor, have remained committed to the close alliance with the US, despite strong suspicions that the US had played a significant role in the dismissal of this democratically elected Government.

The bi-partisan approach to foreign affairs and defence by the major parties since 2001 has meant that there has been no discussion or debate in the Parliament on these issues. This situation should be unacceptable in a democracy. Once again Australia has effectively ceded policy making in these areas to another major power. Policies are skewed to meet the demands of the US rather than the defence of Australia.

This is exemplified by the changing purpose and function of Pine Gap, a nominally joint facility. Malcolm Fraser expressed concerns that, "It has become an offensive facility and would be a vital part of America's offensive capabilities in any conflict in the Western Pacific". Des Ball has expressed similar concerns about the changing role of Pine Gap.

Fraser also referred to a report in *The Australian* that we are developing a new capacity so that America can aim and fire missiles from Australian ships.

Australia has now reached the dangerous and unacceptable situation, where we could be drawn into a major war by the US without any prior consultation or agreement. We have given the US the power to take us into a war and possibly a nuclear war. Is this what Australia wants?

Pressure to increase military spending

The US has been pressuring its allies to increase military spending to at least 2% of GNP. Australia is responding to that pressure as reflected in recent announcements. But this increased spending is being driven by American priorities and not necessarily by Australia's defence needs.

Inter-operability

In 2012 Admiral Gary Roughead, former Head of US Naval Operations wrote that, "Interoperability will become increasingly more important in the likely future strategic environment, particularly as China continues to gain power in the Asia-Pacific region." That process has continued apace with no significant debate in the Australian Parliament or Press. It is another example of the extent to which Australia's actual defence force as well as its policies are being subsumed by the US Defence Force, thereby increasing our level of "strategic Dependence". It has also led to greater pressure to purchase more US manufactured weaponry. These changes have occurred with virtually no reference to the Australian people.

Rising militarism in the Asia Pacific region

China is a rising economic and military power and one we will have to learn to live with. It has also been driving economic growth in the Indo Pacific region. It is Australia's largest trading partner and has been responsible for driving economic growth in Australia. Therefore it is quite reasonable for China to expect to be treated with respect by Australia.

Xi Jinping has indicated that China will push back against any attempts to contain China by the US and its allies. This is understandable. As a medium power Australia should strive to remain neutral in any disputes between these two superpowers. It should also seek to convince the US to share power with China in the Asia Pacific rather than seek to maintain its sole super power status.

If America were to lose a war with China it can retreat to the western hemisphere where Australia could not withdraw anywhere and could find itself isolated, a defeated ally of a defeated superpower. China's Asian neighbours seem to be adopting a much more nuanced and sophisticated approach to their relationship with a rising China. They realise that while America may come and go from our region China is here to stay.

With a burgeoning national debt it remains unclear how long America will be able to support its massive military spending. Chalmers Johnson in *Nemesis* (2006) argued that, "To maintain our empire abroad requires resources and commitments that will eventually undercut our domestic democracy and in the end produce a military dictatorship or its civilian equivalent.....But the combination of huge standing armies almost continuous wars, military Keynesianism, and ruinous military expenses have destroyed our republican structure in favour of an imperial presidency. We are on the cusp of losing our democracy for the sake of keeping our empire. Once a nation is started on that path, the dynamics that apply to all empires come into play – isolation, overstretch, the uniting of forces opposed to imperialism and bankruptcy."

The US has continued down this path at an alarming pace.

Jimmy Carter, the only US president to complete his term without war, military attack or occupation has called the United States "the most warlike nation in the history of the world."

In 2019 Carter revealed that he had spoken with President Donald Trump, who was worried about China's growing economy and expressed concern that "China is getting ahead of us." Carter, who normalized diplomatic relations between Washington and Beijing in 1979, said he told Trump that much of China's success was due to its peaceful foreign policy. Carter said the US has been at peace for only 16 of its 242 years as a nation. Since 1979 China has been at peace with its neighbours and the world. China's peace dividend had allowed its economic growth while the US has spent \$5.9 trillion waging war in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan and other nations since 2001. It is a high

price to pay for being captured by the armaments industry. Carter advised Trump that, “China has not wasted a single penny on war, and that’s why they are ahead of us in almost every way.”

Is this the path that Australia wants to follow? In the aftermath of a series of unjustified, costly and failed overseas military interventions and the changing strategic environment in the Asia Pacific, Australia must now move to develop its own fully independent defence policy before we become embroiled in ever more costly conflicts that could become nuclear.

Foreign Policy

We have observed elsewhere in this submission that Australia relies exclusively on its alliance with the US for its security and this has taken us into a series of foreign wars where our involvement is seen as a “down payment” on American support through the ANZUS Treaty.

In none of these wars have we been under any real and objective threat and most have been illegal in international law.

Australia can be accurately seen as one of the most warlike nations on earth given the number of foreign wars we have waged as a subordinate component of the British and American empires.

At two times in our history, we have edged towards a better way of resolving issues between nations. Our first great effort on the international stage was our supportive role in the establishment of the United Nations. The second was under the Whitlam government that questioned the role of US bases in Australia and made tentative steps towards greater independence from America.

We think of ourselves as a rational and intelligent species but we are acting contrary to our knowledge of the past and the likely consequences if we continue down our current path.

“Great power” rivalry and armed conflict as the means to resolve issues became untenable with the development of atomic weapons. It is only through luck that we have avoided catastrophe. The “Doomsday Clock” is seconds from midnight.

We believe that the only sane and moral course to chart is one of independence and neutrality from armed rivalries. We might then play a more constructive foreign policy role in developing and advocating for non-violent resolution of international disputes.

“Experts” in the military, foreign policy, big business and arms equipment industries may see this statement as to the way forward as naive or even treasonous. We ask then, given the potential for social and economic ruin, mass deaths and hunger, environmental damage and destruction of our homes and cities, what is the sane and patriotic course: war or peace?

Political (including Democratic) Rights

For reasons difficult to justify we tend to adopt many of the political and policy settings of America. They lead, we follow. We adopt and foster the “fear”, and then put into place repressive laws to counter the “threat”.

“Cold War” paranoia and anti-Islam overreach are notable examples of this tendency.

This has also been the case with the plethora of increasingly intrusive, restrictive and undemocratic security and surveillance laws. We like to criticise other countries for repressive laws but we show little insight into our own egregious breaches of civil liberties and democratic norms.

In Canberra we have closely observed the vindictive prosecution of Bernard Collaery and Witness K who exposed the grossly improper bugging of the Timor Leste government in a dispute about sea boundaries and access to resources.

We have observed the relentless US government pursuit of Julian Assange, a journalist, who exposed US war crimes.

We are running a substantial risk of becoming the opposite of all we most value in our history and identity. We do not wish to live in an authoritarian state with extensive police and secret security powers that repress free speech, a crusading media, the right to peaceful dissent and open and transparent accountable government.

Perfecting our democracy is an ongoing task and this national project is being undermined by the repressive demands arising out of the US alliance.

PAX MUNDI