

Jo Whitehead

*I believe it is important that an alternative viewpoint to the ANZUS agreement is made.*

I firmly believe that Australia should never have joined the USA in the war in Afghanistan. There was no discussion about going to war and this is wrong. Many people like me were peacefully demonstrating in the streets against Australia's commitment even though the ex-Prime Minister John Howard recently said that there was overwhelming support for his decision to go to war.

Consequently Australia has been involved in a 20 year war that seems to have achieved very little for the Afghani people and in fact has caused more than 47,000 Afghani people being killed and devastation to the everyday lives of surviving Afghani's.

This war and the ANZUS Treaty has also caused so much pain and heartache to the many Australians involved in it. For example, there were 41 Australian soldiers killed, 261 Australian soldiers wounded, at least 500 Australian soldiers who were so scarred by their experiences they committed suicide and over 47,000 innocent Afghani's killed as well as millions of Afghani's displaced by the devastation of their homes. How can these statistics be justified?

As well as the human consequences of John Howard taking Australia to war alongside the USA through the ANZUS agreement, there has been \$9 billion of public money that has been wasted on this futile war. Knowing these statistics above, as well as the dollar costs of this war in Afghanistan, it is high time to evaluate the US alliance so that these events are never repeated.

I believe it is Australia's great shame that our Prime Minister at the time took us to war, without any discussion, Australia's great shame that so many Afghani's were killed and displaced, that many Afghani refugees were and are treated so poorly in Australia, that Australian soldiers were killed and so badly affected by what they saw and did in Afghanistan that they took their lives and that so much of the Australian people's money was used on this war instead of making our country a better place in which to live.

What also makes me very angry are the harsh conditions that Australia has imposed on Afghani people seeking safety in Australia. We bomb their country and then reject their pleas for refugee status as well as keep many locked up in off-shore prisons with no hope of a settled life. In addition, the Afghani's who are, after waiting several years deemed genuine refugees are only allowed to have temporary visas and are forced to beg in the community in order to survive. And then we do not properly plan our withdrawal from Afghanistan which has meant leaving many people who helped Australian troops during the war, abandoned and fearful for their future and their lives.