

War Resisters International (Australia)

Since Australia was first colonised in 1788, there has always been a deep underlying fear that another country will invade and occupy this vast and relatively empty land. As a result, the idea of dependence on a great and powerful friend has pervaded this predominantly white settler society, preventing the emergence of an independent foreign policy or a vision of Australia as a country in the Asia-Pacific region rather than an extension of Europe on the wrong side of the world.

Until 1942, this meant dependence on the Royal Navy then after that, the United States with the quid pro quo that in both cases Australia had to send troops in support of their military adventures even when they were nothing to do with Australia. Thus in the eyes of many political figures, Australia became a country whose image was built around the legend of the ANZACs and subsequent wars and glorification of our military forces, particularly on ANZAC Day and through the construction of extravagant war memorials both in Canberra and overseas.

The cost has been enormous in terms of the waste of young lives and heavy expenditure on irrelevant military equipment tying us in with the military forces of our allies. This has diverted money from real domestic security needs and put emphasis on military solutions to conflicts rather than developing non-military solutions. This would also decouple Australia from obsolete military alliances like ANZUS and involvement in foreign wars like the current one in Afghanistan and Peacekeeping operations.

WRI Australia feels that the money currently allocated to the Australian military budget would be better spent on (a) strengthening the Department of Foreign Affairs in the Asia-Pacific region; (b) creating centres for conflict studies and peace research; (c) creating a military force that is made available to the United Nations for peacekeeping programmes and disaster relief; (d) developing a naval force of small customs vessels (built in Australia) for coastal patrols; and (e) supporting agencies of the United Nations that are desperately short of funds, like the UNHCR.