

Australians for War Powers Reform

"What are the costs and consequences of Australia's involvement in US-led wars? A peoples' Inquiry into the US-Australia Alliance."

Australians took part in nine wars in our colonial period, which included fighting Indigenous people and Maoris. From 1901 to the present, Australia sent troops eleven times to wars or warlike operations. In only one of them, the war against Japan, were Australians fighting in defence of our own country. In all of them (except East Timor, 1999-2000), Australian forces were deployed against Britain's enemies or America's. When Australia sought US military support in the East Timor crisis of 1999, it was refused.

From 1945 on, none of the conflicts in which Australia supported the United States resulted in victory (except the brief deployment to Kuwait, 1990-91). Australia withdrew its forces from Korea following an armistice, and retreated from failed wars in Vietnam, Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

Taking into account the thousands of Australian deaths and injuries, the huge financial and social losses, and the damage inflicted on other countries and their people, the costs of these wars clearly outweigh the benefits. Yet some Australians urge us to prepare for more wars, against enemies of the US, in space, and in cyberspace.

At the same time, the resources and influence of DFAT to seek alternatives to war are progressively shrinking. Grossly insufficient diplomatic efforts are made to abide by treaties Australia has ratified. Several of them impose conditions on the use or threat of armed force. Australia actively resists negotiations to restrict or ban lethal technologies, including nuclear weapons.

Australia has made itself a target for America's enemies by permitting bases on our territory which contribute to US war-fighting capability. Their targeting and intelligence functions, and the interoperability of the ADF with American forces are so extensive that Australia would probably be unable to withdraw from a new US war even if it wanted to.

Astonishingly these issues, of fundamental importance to our security, are rarely discussed in our parliament, which should be the epicentre of our democracy. Proposals for war are not given the debate and scrutiny they need by all our elected representatives. Instead they are decided behind closed doors by, at best, a tiny handful of ministers and, at worst, one person, the PM. Australian interests are marginalised in order to follow the US to war again and again, with repeated disastrous results.

The collapse of the NATO and Australian intervention in Afghanistan makes it timely to assess the costs of our many wars. The benefits are always said to derive from the 70 year-old ANZUS alliance, which has not been adapted to modern circumstances. Australian supporters of ANZUS claim it delivers high-level access in Washington; intelligence shared with Five Eyes partners; weapons purchases, training and servicing; and US defence of Australia. All are either unreliable, overpriced, or not competitive with what other US allies receive.

Yet Australian governments persist in relying unquestioningly on the Alliance for our security, and most recently, the AUKUS partnership. Before Australia enters another overseas war, our Parliament should thoroughly reconsider both, against their likely costs.

AWPR recommends that Australia move without delay to establish:

- An amendment to the Defence Act requiring a debate and a vote in Parliament before the ADF is deployed to overseas conflict, and an inquiry after it.
- An independent public inquiry into the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria,
- A review and update of the ANZUS Alliance, including the use of the Treaty, which emphasises peace, as a pretext for wars.
- A review of the AUKUS partnership, which emphasises war, and eliminates Australia's foreign policy independence.