

“Australian military policy – who decides? A look at the decisions behind Australia’s support for both the invasion of Iraq and a nuclear-armed US”.

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I initially want to congratulate the individuals who have organised this important gathering and say thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today. It is important because in far too many respects Australian foreign and military policies are aligned with US policies in ways that run totally counter to our own national interests and the interests that we hold in common with 7 billion other fellow humans.

Just before starting I want to pick up on the point that Marty Branagan made about divestment being a valuable tool, and let you all know that ICAN, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, is targeting Australia’s Future Fund to try to get them out of investments in nuclear weapons producing companies. I’d encourage you to check the ICAN info on that and support the campaign.

I’ve chosen the two issues of the invasion of Iraq and Australia’s nuclear weapons policy because each of them exemplifies the problem we face - Australian policies made in secret, on matters of profound importance, in stark defiance of the clear wishes of the Australian people, and with parliament not being consulted. In the case of the invasion of Iraq, the consequences were catastrophic for millions of people and will continue for decades. In the case of nuclear weapons, Australia contributes to the stalemate whereby 17,000 of the world’s most horrific weapons are retained by a tiny handful of countries.

I want first to remind us all of the treaty that is sometimes invoked to claim that Australia is obliged to support our ally’s military policies, the ANZUS Treaty. The Treaty was signed in 1951 and came into force in 1952. The three ANZUS member states, Australia, New Zealand and the US, agreed to the following:

Preamble: Reaffirming their faith in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and their desire to live in peace with all people and all governments, and desiring to strengthen the fabric of peace in the Pacific Area,

Article 1: “The Parties undertake, as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, to settle any international disputes in which they may be involved by peaceful means.....and to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.”

Article 11 states that the Parties will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack.

Article 111: *“The Parties will consult together whenever in the opinion of any one of them the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened in the Pacific.”*

Article VI reiterates that it is the United Nations that is responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Note that the importance of the UN – whose primary purpose as set out in its Charter is to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war” - is mentioned several times. So when our leaders tell us that ANZUS compels us to do this or that to support our ally they should be told to go and read the Treaty. The Treaty is of course not all totally aligned with IPAN’s goals, and there will be different interpretations, but overall its emphasis is on the maintenance of peace in the Pacific and the pre-eminent role of the UN in doing this.

Now I’m going to say a little about the invasion of Iraq, which was a long-standing goal of some within the US, going back to at least 1998 and the founding of the Project for a New American Century. On September 11, 2001, within hours of the terrorist attacks in the US, Defence Secretary Rumsfeld was privately suggesting military attacks on Iraq. Two months later, on November 21, after Afghanistan had been invaded, President Bush instructed Rumsfeld to construct in secret a fresh plan for going to war in Iraq.

As you are all aware Prime Minister John Howard was in the US on September 11. On September 12, after a discussion with US ambassador Tom Schieffer and a phone call to Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer, Howard pledged Australian support for the US and invoked the ANZUS Treaty, automatically indicating that Australia did not see the crimes of September 11 as a matter for any criminal court to deal with but as acts requiring a military response, including from Australia. Cabinet was not consulted.

The “selling” of war on Iraq rested, as you all know, on the matter of alleged WMD programs in Iraq. The best source of intelligence on Iraq’s weapons programs was of course the UN weapons inspectors. About a thousand of them, including over 150 Australians, had been in the country since the 1991 Gulf War, building up a massive database on Iraqi capabilities. There was a hiatus after 1998 when the US and UK bombing campaign called Operation Desert Fox led to Saddam Hussein banning further inspections. In late 2002, with the threat of war, he allowed inspectors back in and they continued their work almost until the outbreak of war in March 2003. Both Hans Blix, the head of the inspections program, and Mohammed ElBaradei, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, reported that while more time was needed, there was no evidence of prohibited WMD activity.

In Australia, the Defence Intelligence Organisation, with its staff of experts on nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, maintained throughout that Iraq had not restarted a WMD program. However the Office of National Assessments, with a more political rather than technical focus, was more upbeat about Iraqi capability, reporting that “Iraq has almost certainly been working to increase its ability to make chemical and biological weapons” – even that assessment was hardly a justification for war. Perhaps because the Australian intelligence assessments did not support the case for war, when Howard addressed

parliament on 4 February 2003, he referred not to Australian intelligence reports but to the far more aggressive US and UK reports that were so tragically wrong.

Iraq was not remotely a threat to Australia and yet we helped invade the country because the US was doing so. In the process we intensified terrorism, helped bring untold suffering to millions of people, destabilised a whole region and more, and strengthened our reputation as a pawn in the hands of the US. If that does not indicate a problem in the nature of our relationship with the US, then it's hard to imagine a scenario that would.

It also indicates a problem with the way in which Australian troops can be sent to war. In 2002 – 2003, Howard ignored the clear wishes of millions of Australians and he ignored the views of elected parliamentarians who spoke out against the war. They had not been asked for their views.

And yet for all this there has been zero accountability. Let's talk about pink batts and naughty union officials but let's ignore Australia's role in one of the worst crimes of aggression in living memory. The result is that we are clearly at risk of doing it all again when next the US goes to war unless there is a change of the war powers of the government.

We should remember too that good friends give sound advice when it's needed, even if it's unwelcome. Former Prime Minister Fraser reminds us that during the 1950s when there was tension between China and the US in the Taiwan Straits, Prime Minister Menzies told President Eisenhower very clearly that if war eventuated Australia would not be part of it. Friendship is quite different from a master-servant relationship where one side calls all the shots.

Australian leaders' responsibility is to the Australian people, not to the US president and any hidden agendas within the White House. This requires an Australian foreign and defence policy that is independent from the military ambitions of our ally. It is not in Australia's interests to be seen as a pawn in another nation's quest for global dominance.

In addition, all leaders have a responsibility towards the global common good. It is in our interests to promote a reduction of military activity by all nations and greater focus on the real threats to our security, such as rampant climate change and dwindling resources.

Turning now to the issue of nuclear weapons, the most terrible devices ever created. One of the striking things about Australian policy on these weapons, these same weapons that were so threatening to us in March 2003 that we went to war because John Howard thought Iraq had some, is that the role they play in Australia's defence is virtually not discussed at an official level. Defence white papers make cursory reference to them, as if our need for nuclear weapons is self-evident and requires no explanation. We are simply offered the circular argument that as long as nuclear weapons exist we need to be protected by them ourselves, and US weapons will do that for us via extended nuclear deterrence. We need to watch those "rogue states" though; by some unexplained logic, nuclear deterrence doesn't work for them as it does for us law-abiding ones.

Successive Australian governments, while stating their support for a nuclear weapons free world, have opposed the very significant moves internationally that could see the commencement of negotiations for a treaty to ban nuclear weapons. ICAN, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, has acquired under FOI government documents that make clear the reason for this opposition – it is that Australia relies on US nuclear weapons and extended deterrence.

In October 2013, at the UN First Committee (which deals with peace and security issues), Australia refused a request by New Zealand to endorse a 125-nation joint statement highlighting the humanitarian impact of these weapons. Australia's specific objection was to a sentence declaring that nuclear weapons must never be used again, "under any circumstances". Australia believed this cut across our position on deterrence, and that for the deterrent to be credible, we cannot rule out the use of the weapons. This begs the question: If Australia cannot agree with the majority of nations that nuclear weapons should never be used again under any circumstances, then under what circumstances does Australia believe they should be used?

The FOI documents reveal that Australian officials consulted US officials regularly in relation to the First Committee statements on this topic. One diplomat wrote, *"There has [sic] been frequent high-level exchanges going on with the US on this. As you can imagine, the US position on this is clear ... the wording 'under any circumstances' is of course anathema to them, and they see this as the 'Trojan horse' which will undermine the NPT, and provide an alternative and possibly dangerous path to a nuclear weapons convention."*

However Japan decided to sign the New Zealand-led statement, which apparently earned them a reprimand from the US. One Australian diplomat wrote in an email, *"We're particularly mindful of the strength of the US's response to Japan's approach"*. In other words, Japan has been told off for its disobedience; we don't want to be also. Australian diplomats refused to sign the NZ statement and instead put forward their own statement, which received a much lower level of support.

This was not an isolated out-of-character incident where the Australian government momentarily forgot to whom they are responsible. It is a continuing pattern under both Coalition and Labor governments. Under Prime Minister Rudd, Australia's foreign and defence departments made a secret joint submission to the 2009 US nuclear posture review, in which they said that Australia's NPT obligations to help achieve disarmament *"must be balanced against our strategic interest in ensuring stability through ensuring a credible US extended deterrence"*. In February 2009, during a closed session of the US Congressional Commission on Strategic Posture, the Australian ambassador to the United States, Dennis Richardson, encouraged the US government to maintain a strong and effective nuclear arsenal. He boasted of Australia's "vital" and "enduring" contribution to the US nuclear force posture through facilities such as Pine Gap, and urged the United States "to make clear that it would respond in kind to nations that employ nuclear weapons

against friends and allies of the US....”.

This must all be seen in the context of the views of most Australians on nuclear weapons. Nielsen poll results released earlier this month indicated that 84% of respondents said the Australian government should support the current efforts for a global treaty banning nuclear weapons. This poll reinforced the results of a poll some years earlier, in 1998, that also indicated that an overwhelming majority of Australians believe that Australia should help negotiate a global treaty to ban and destroy all nuclear weapons.

So all this can only lead to the rhetorical question: Exactly who is the Australian government listening to on the issue of the world’s most destructive weapons, its own people or a foreign government that holds a significant percentage of the global nuclear arsenal? Ditto on the issue of going to war: Who is our government listening to and to whom do they regard themselves as being responsible?

Former PM Malcolm Fraser summed up our situation in May 2013, in the ICAN booklet “Disarmament Doublespeak”. He wrote, *“We are dramatically ramping up Australia as a subservient US military base, with growing spy, surveillance and communications facilities; increasing military exercising; US troops on permanent rotation; plans for drones based on the Cocos Islands; and possibly a US aircraft carrier taskforce in Fremantle. We are accomplices to a hazardous and provocative US policy of containment of China which risks a new cold war. We, our children and the world deserve better.”*

In this centenary year of the start of the Great War, we are constantly reminded of the courage of the Anzac soldiers, and often of their larrikin and independent spirit that precluded such formalities as saluting British officers. How ironic it is that 100 years later we see a fawning and humiliating subservience to a different breed of political masters. Australian leaders would do well to show some of the courage in dealing with our great Pacific ally that they so admire in the Anzac troops.