

Speech at Demonstration Against Military Spending

by Nick Deane

Members of MPG and the AABCC are here today to demonstrate, that is to show, our indignation at the way in which simply vast amounts are being spent, all over the world, on armaments. We are here to raise our voices against the ridiculous wastage and unnecessary damage that this represents. We don't believe that it is necessary, useful or beneficial to humankind.

The figures speak for themselves. For the globe at large, roughly \$250 is spent each year for every man, woman and child on the planet. For Australia, the figure is roughly four times as much, somewhere around \$1,000 or \$20 a week for each and every individual. As spenders, we are in the top 15 nations and our Minister for Defence has said that we are in the top 2 *per capita*.

So here we are, a continental island with a comparatively small population, situated in the far South East – but up there in the big league when it comes to spending on things military – spending, as we do, about four times the global *per capita* average.

So the question is “Why is this so?” “Why does Australia, of all countries, spend so very much?” “Why, as good people, do we allow this to happen?”

Fear of invasion could be an answer. It does have something of a history in Australia. However, we don't actually have *any* hostile neighbours and we do not face any invasion threat.

We are in fact, because of our geographical position, extremely safe. No-one has invaded Australia since 1788. Even the Japanese decided not to in 1942, when they were at the height of their military power. The threat of invasion is a popular misconception – one that might help explain why we spend so much on defence – but not enough to explain it on its own - there are other aspects to consider.

Since WWII Australia has been involved in 4 major military conflicts in distant places, three of them taking place in living memory. The four wars were in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq. Let's look at some of the common features of these four wars.

First of all, in each war, our forces were involved in military action thousands of kilometres beyond our shores.

Secondly, the countries in which we engaged in military action posed no threat to this country. Our forces were by no means defending Australia.

In passing, notice that these features make Australia one of the world's aggressor nations, but they are still not enough to answer the question.

For that we need to turn to another common feature of the four wars...That in each of them Australians fought alongside American counter-parts and in each war Australia was involved at the behest of our ally, the United States of America.

The military closeness we have developed with America goes a long way towards answering the question of why we spend so much on defence.

The US has by far the greatest military expenditure in the world. It accounts for 46% of the global total, which is more than the next twelve countries combined.

The US is also home to the armaments manufacturing companies that have the largest outputs of military supplies. The scale of the US armaments industry is vast.

With almost every State in the US home to some sort of defence establishment or armaments business, every US Congressman has to consider jobs and/or votes that could be lost if that industry were to decline in any measure. And this means, of course, that the US armaments industry has the most enormous political clout.

Vested interests within the US armaments industry have influenced the US government and ensured that it has continued to purchase more and more weaponry – to the extent that a decline in the industry could have serious ramifications for the US economy as a whole. The US is politically and economically locked into the manufacture and trade of armaments. This is why you may hear people like me talking about the US prospering from a state of perpetual war, or saying that it is a nation that nurtures itself through the manufacture and trade of armaments.

As I see it, Australia is part of this, same, US-dominated global system of arms industry and trade, that few dare challenge, for fear of the economic consequences.

It is an especially ugly picture when you take into account the industry's underlying purpose. For what purpose do any weapons have? They exist for the sole purpose of harming or obliterating human life. They are there to kill people.

And it's not just the money. It is the diversion of people's time and energy, their creativity. It is scarce resources being diverted, contributing to the destruction of the environment – damage to all life, not just human life. It is unambiguously negative, in terms of any benefit to us. Yet we each continue to contribute \$20 plus a week.

As part of the US Military/Industrial/Media complex, we are drawn into America's wars and we buy her weapons – thereby keeping the wheels of the economy turning. We hear more and more about the importance of 'inter-operability', which, being interpreted, means remaining obliged to keep buying the latest American military gadgetry, locked in to being able to operate alongside American forces, constrained to understand and use their weapons, and weapons and communication systems.

That explains why we are buying the Lockheed Martin F35 Joint Strike Fighter – an extremely expensive aircraft, that is probably not much use as a weapon in any case. An utter waste. And who benefits from the purchase? Only Lockheed Martin. That's why you are invited to squander counterfeit one hundred-dollar bills on this white elephant.

So close has our unhealthy alliance with the US become that it is virtually impossible for Australia to refuse any military request from the US. Ex PM Malcolm Fraser said very recently, Australia is "hostage to decisions made in a country 10,000 kilometres away".

A glaring example of Australia's willingness to accept US influence can be seen in the way we invited US Marines to be based in Darwin. No discussion here, no debate in the parliament. The announcement that they would be coming was made jointly by our PM and the US President – but it might just as well have come directly from the US President on his own. The Marines are here now. We get excited about small bands of helpless and disheveled asylum-seekers arriving by boat, whilst we gaily ignore the presence on our shores of up to 2,500 fully armed, trained killers from a foreign country.

When President Obama was in Darwin, to make the announcement, he addressed Australian troops, and said something very revealing. He said “You’ve lived and served alongside your American colleagues day-in, day-out... You work together so well, it’s often said you can’t tell where our guys end and you guys begin.” It was intended as a compliment to our troops. There was no irony intended. I see it as simply revealing the actual state of affairs.

The presence of US Marines in Darwin illustrates Australia’s deep involvement with the US military machine. This involvement makes us buy hugely expensive devices that, given our happy geographical situation, we do not really need, that have the sole purpose of damaging human beings.

And, of course, there are alternatives. The time, energy, money, resources and human creativity currently channeled into researching, manufacturing and distributing weapons could be diverted to much better purposes – for example, to meet the UN’s Millenium goals. Those goals could be reached with one tenth of the money spent on things military.

So what can we, the ordinary, powerless people do? Well, today I can offer you a number of things.

You can have a good look at the way Australian forces become committed to action overseas, and, in that connection, I commend to you a petition drafted by the Marrickville Peace Group, calling for a ‘War Powers Bill’ to change the existing decision-making process. At present, as was the case with the invasion of Iraq, Australia can commit itself to military action overseas without the matter even being mentioned in the parliament beforehand. Every other major decision must be debated in parliament before it is decided – but not the most important one of all – the decision to commit the nation to war! So, please, add your signature to our petition.

You can make a symbolic gesture right now by taking one of our counterfeit \$100 notes and sticking it onto our cardboard replicas of an F35 or a submarine.

Faced with the coming election, we all have a marvelous opportunity to raise the issue of military expenditure with candidates – bearing in mind that both the major parties appear committed to maintaining defence spending. Mr Albanese was invited to speak here today, but he has not taken up the invitation. No doubt Hall Greenland will have more to say about this.

You could even join our local Marrickville Peace Group, where we are informed by the epithet “For evil to prevail in the world, it is only necessary for good people to do nothing”. You could be one of the people who does a little more than nothing!

And there is one other thing - you could come to a public meeting this coming Wednesday, when you can hear what an ex-US Marine has to say. This ex-marine, Vincent Emanuele, completed two tours of duty in Iraq that changed his mind about war, and he now campaigns for peace. So grab a flyer and come along to Addison Road on Wednesday night.

It is time we started to dismantle the war machine.

6th July 2013