

Marrickville Peace Group

31 October 2011

The Hon. Julia Gillard
Prime Minister of Australia
Parliament House
CANBERRA
ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister

The recent communiqué, following the AUSMIN meeting in San Francisco, made it clear once again that the Australian Government considers that the nation's safety and security is predominantly dependant upon a strong alliance with the United States (US). The tenor of the communiqué (and also the Australian government's Defence White Paper (DWP) of 2009) display and perpetuate an underlying fear of military attack. Indeed, your Government's position appears to rest on the premise that Australia is constantly under some sort of threat, a premise of fear.

The Marrickville Peace Group (MPG) disputes this position. In our view Australia has no powerful enemies and is not at risk of any military attack. We concur with a paragraph from the DWP 2009, which states "*The enduring reality of our strategic outlook is that Australia will most likely remain, by virtue of our geostrategic location, a secure country over the period to 2030*" (para 6.23). We find it hard to conceive of a situation in which some supposed enemy would wish to launch an attack. What would be the purpose? What hope would any malevolent, foreign power have of dominating a territory as large as Australia? The military difficulties of attacking and dominating Australia are quite sufficient to deter any other country, however powerful, from giving such an idea serious consideration.

There has been only one successful invasion of Australia – the one that began in 1788. The success of that invasion lay in the vastly superior technology possessed by the invaders – a situation that would not be found today.

Some have argued that an enemy might wish to steal our natural resources. We find that proposition absurd. Any foreign nation with an eye on our resources has only to offer to purchase them. That is demonstrably true. We have built a reputation for being a reliable supplier and willing trader – and therein lies our security.

In short, there is no need for anyone to launch an attack and no likelihood of one happening. The fear of attack that seems to underly Defence Policy is, we hold, entirely misplaced. We view it as out-dated, misguided and, ultimately, contrary to the nation's best interests. It may even have the effect of making us enemies where none previously existed.

From the premise of constant fear of attack arises the supposed need for the nation to be constantly prepared to go to war. And, focussing only on the period following the Second World War, Australia has proved that it is ready to go to war all too often!

In Vietnam, Australia spent many years fighting – at enormous cost in terms of both the budget and human lives – in a war that resulted in 'our side' being defeated. Vietnam is now a country with which we have cordial relations and conduct regular trade. What did that military action gain the nation, exactly, and at what price?

In Iraq in 2003, Australia joined the military action that destroyed that nation's infrastructure, putting it years behind in terms of development. Our engagement there was based on a

deceitful interpretation of available intelligence. We had no business joining that invasion and now, rightly, feel a sense of collective shame.

In Afghanistan, Australia finds itself engaged in a futile conflict, one that is costing far too much money and destroying far too many lives (both Australian and Afghani). There is no prospect of a 'victory', and no prospect of our presence in Afghanistan giving any meaningful benefit to anyone.

In each one our so-called 'Defence' forces were used in distant lands – in what many would view as aggressive actions. In all three actions it can be argued that our participation was more about upholding the alliance with the US than it was about protecting our legitimate, national interests.

For a second consequence of the 'premise of fear', mentioned above, is the misplaced urge to rely on the power and strength of the US military. It is as though we, as a nation, believe we are in such danger that can only be safe by clinging to the US. We rest that on the notion that the US and Australia hold and uphold particular shared values – values of peace, freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

The unfortunate truth is that the US, so far from practicing these espoused values, has been implicated in many acts that are totally contrary to them:- acts of unnecessary violence; the deprivation of people's freedom without recourse to any legal process; the summary executions of presumed leaders of terrorist organisations (making use of highly sophisticated weaponry) in the territories of foreign nations, being examples. The US has engaged in illegal acts of warfare. The use of torture has been condoned at the highest levels.

The situation has been reached in which the 'military industrial complex' has become so entrenched that the economy of the US is now dependant on military expenditure. If the US were to reduce that expenditure (on manufacturing and marketing items that have no purpose beyond the destruction of human life), the economic consequence might be catastrophic. The US is in the ghastly situation where it must maintain military production, so as to maintain economic prosperity. Naturally, the best way to stimulate demand for all things military is through warfare – which may account for the US's growing reputation as an aggressive nation. (It has been reported that the US has initiated some sort of military action every 14 months since the end of the World War II, which is to say, on a regular basis for seventy years).

Yet, simultaneously, the US claims to be bringing peace to the world. This should be seen for what it is – straightforward hypocrisy.

So, out of misplaced fear, Australia is placing huge emphasis on its alliance with a nation that MPG would describe as aggressive, hypocritical and locked into excessive use of military hardware and action.

By its alignment with the US, Australia actually stands in danger of creating enemies where previously it had none. This is nowhere more apparent than in the case of China. The US has enhanced its military presence on the island of Guam. It has accepted South Korea's militarisation of Jeju island. It is now seeking to gain greater access to facilities in Australia. All of these actions are taken with some imagined threat in mind, and the language of the AUSMIN communiqué and the DWP only thinly disguise the perceived source of that threat – which is, without doubt, China. What is revealed (between the lines of the official documents) is a prodigious fear of China's growing influence. More alarmingly, what is also revealed is a determination to meet China's growing influence by confronting it militarily. In our view, the US is only steps away from being actively threatening towards China.

In the light of its close alignment with the US, China might be justified in beginning to view Australia with circumspection – if not downright suspicion. Through this process we run the risk of damaging our good relations with this our powerful neighbour.

Australia would be better advised to maintain the strength of its links with China by putting more distance between itself and the US. In the words of Professor Hugh White “...it’s a matter of Australia thinking very carefully about the extent to which it supports the US.”

Just as it has expressed opposition to the expansion of military expenditure proposed in the DWP, the Marrickville Peace Group is opposed to any further escalation of the presence of US military interests in Australia. We anticipate hearing the announcement of intentions to re-open the facility at North West Cape and foreshadow our opposition to that.

Within Europe, where wars have been fought over many centuries, the idea of one nation taking up arms against another is now totally redundant. This is showing the way to a more peaceful future. After centuries of making war, clear-thinking people are coming to the realisation that war is futile.

As a group, we look forward to a time when the leaders of Australia adopt such an enlightened attitude.

Sincerely

Nick Deane
On behalf of the Marrickville Peace Group.