

I salute the Larrakia people, the traditional owners of the land we are on, and I pay my respects to their elders, past and present. This always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

I also want to thank IPAN for trusting me to explain why our network is opposed to the US marine garrison currently residing in Darwin. And I must say that I do feel a bit like a horse that's been 'given its head'.

I'm sure that, for the most part, I am preaching to the already converted. I think you all have in mind good and valid reasons for opposing the presence of the marines, but, as a starting-point, let's go through some of them quickly.

- As a general point, it is strategically most unwise for any country to entertain the armed forces of a foreign power in anything other than extreme circumstances. The presence of armed forces that are not under the control of the host nation immediately and automatically compromises the host's sovereignty.
- In Australia's case, our government's justification for this compromise lies in the enduring friendship between Australia and the USA. There is no denying that friendship – however, friendship is not a sufficient or valid reason to jeopardise the nation's independence.
- The marines' presence sends a very clear message, to all countries, that Australia will always side with the USA and fight alongside the USA in any military confrontation that may develop. By thus making every enemy of the USA also ours, it creates enemies for us, when we need have none – as John Pilger has just told us. It also creates the impression that we Australians don't quite believe in our own capacity to look after ourselves, independently.
- The marines always operate within the US Marine Corps chain of command, meaning that they could engage in military action on orders from Washington, regardless of the wishes of the Australian government, with potential, dire consequences.
- In the event of any hostilities in the region involving the USA, Darwin could become a legitimate target for an attack – whether or not Australia was involved in those hostilities.

So there is an incomplete bunch of reasons. I haven't covered local reasons because I don't know enough about them and other speakers will enlighten you and me.

I do, however, want to dwell on one further reason for opposing the presence of the Darwin garrison, which relates to the formation of IPAN itself.

Back in 2011, there were, scattered around Australia, a few like-minded people who held in common grave doubts about Australia's alliance with the USA – particularly following the 2003 invasion of Iraq (and never mind going back as far as the war in Vietnam). This scattering of people watched with dismay as, with each passing 'AUSMIN' conference, the alliance was being constantly deepened and strengthened; 'enhanced' is the official term – with no apparent regard for the debacle in Iraq that was then going on. When US President Obama announced that US marines were to be stationed in Darwin, with no public debate beforehand and little since, that took matters just one step too far. It spurred that scattered band to find one another and IPAN was brought into existence.

So the reason for opposing the presence of the US marines, I want to focus on, is that it represents nothing but the latest and greatest manifestation of Australia's alliance with the USA – an alliance, of course, that no less a figure than the late Malcolm Fraser accurately described as 'Dangerous'.

For Australia's Defence Establishment and our mainstream media, describing the alliance in anything other than flattering terms is heresy. As, indeed, is any muttering that challenges the conventional view – that we live and prosper only under the 'protection' of the USA. The Establishment and media are so enthralled by the alliance that until recently one would never hear the slightest whisper of doubt.

Tom Englehardt puts it this way: he writes, "So here's the strange thing, on a planet on which, in 2017, U.S. Special Operations forces deployed to [149 countries](#), or approximately 75% of all nations; on which the USA has perhaps [800 military garrisons](#) outside its own territory; on which the US Navy patrols most of its oceans and seas ... in a century in which it chose to launch full-scale invasions of two countries (Afghanistan and Iraq), is it truly reasonable never to identify the USA as an 'aggressor' anywhere?"

Well, recently it has become slightly more respectable to discuss the Australia/US alliance. We are now hearing some voices from within academia questioning the wisdom of persisting within it or even foreshadowing its end. We do now seem to share a sense that, as we travel down the road of History, we are at a point at which decisions need to be

made and a path chosen, hence this conference's apt image of being at a cross-roads.

So what path will be chosen? The presence of the marines, Pine Gap and the Talisman Sabre Exercises are just three of many indicators of the path we are most likely to choose – if it hasn't already been chosen for us.

All the indicators that I can see tell me that we are going to head down, because we are being led down, the path of "All the way with USA"! We have already all but excluded all other options. But this path; the one we are on; the one that holds up the USA as our saviour and protector; the one that brought US marines to Darwin - has always had and continues to have **war** at its end – and at all turns before you get to the end. In fact war is its end, in both senses of the word. There is no other, logical end-point for the military/industrial economic system of which this country is in danger of making itself a part.

We are not just at a cross-roads. It is not a choice between three, but multiple alternatives.

Sticking with the the USA, as we have for so long, as we keep being reminded – as though mere inertia is a reason for continuing – is only one of many alternatives.

As a nation, we can consider a whole host of foreign policy options. There are multiple roads leading to peace and peaceful co-existence (a term that is not often heard these days).

However, there is one that we know to have war as its certain destination. And, at risk of labouring the point, that is the path Australia is following at present.

Of all the options, this is one we should not choose. For, if we choose to continue "All the way with the USA", I believe we are effectively making a choice for war over peace! And the path to war is one that our country – or any other country, for that matter – should strenuously avoid.

Despite claiming that peace, stability and the rules-based system are its preferred options, WAR is the actual default position of the USA-led West. (Witness current events in the Persian Gulf.) Smedley Butler was right when he told us that War is a Racket. Malcolm Fraser was right when he told us that the only reason we need the protection of the USA is because the USA is

here. Merging these ideas, I put it to you that Australia's alliance with the USA is nothing short of a protection racket.

So what do we do?

In agreeing to entertain US marines, the Australian government made two mistakes, one big, one small. First and foremost, it took our nation one giant, booted stride down the road to war. But, secondly, it provoked the emergence of IPAN.

And within IPAN there was and is a growing sense that it is time to make the pursuit of peace a much more serious business.

A few of us put our heads together and realised that a good place to start questioning the war-path that the USA leads us down, again and again, is with the marines in Darwin. We dreamed and still dream of actually kicking them out. And that metaphor developed into the campaign we call 'Give 'Em The Boot!'

We have tried, over a couple of years, to reach people with this campaign. We have made modest progress, but unfortunately, we don't have truck-loads of smelly, discarded boots to deliver, and we have found that some have interpreted our metaphor a bit too literally. So, just for the record, we don't intend physically kicking anybody.

Returning to metaphor, as things stand, we have little chance of kicking the marines out. But we haven't finished. Although, for now, the best we can do to fulfil our solemn vow we made one another – that we would give them the boot – is through the light-hearted action we have planned for this afternoon. But we need to be realistic and recognise that this action also exposes our comparative powerlessness.

Unless

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Unless we can get something much bigger than this going. Unless enough of us get together and create a great distance between ourselves and what is being allowed to happen (in our name). Unless massive numbers understand what is so very clear to us few. Unless we can generate a movement that exerts real influence. We need more people to take on the struggle, to write, to read, to speak, to inform. There is no other way and no better way. We

have built IPAN into a network that has more potential than it is yet on display.

In summary, the biggest reason for opposing the presence of US marines in Darwin is that their presence is the most recent and visible example of Australia's alliance with the USA – an alliance that is dangerous, because it leads us towards war. From a peace perspective, opposing the presence of the marines amounts to questioning why Australia persists on a foreign policy path that will lead us into war. It is nothing more than that. It is utterly simple. But that is why IPAN says “Terminate the Force Posture Agreement!” and “Give ‘em the Boot!” .