

Raising Peace and World Beyond War Conference 2024

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Australia has always been aligned with military empires: first the British Empire and now that of the USA. In the current era this alignment is misguided. It comes with enormous social and economic costs and does not protect us from current threats - indeed it makes us more of a target. There are alternatives, and we can work together towards them.

This was the subject of a conference hosted by [Raising Peace](#) in conjunction with [World Beyond War](#) on 21 September 2024 in Sydney. The theme was “[NoWar2024: Resisting the USA’s Military Empire](#)” and was part of an international peace conference, with sessions in Germany, Colombia and the USA. What follows is a summary of the conference in Sydney.¹

Australia has long been willing to pay a high price for its alignment with foreign empires. The atomic bomb tests in South Australia were carried out by the British military empire. We heard about their impact on First Nations people and the land. The Indigenous owners of the area were not considered, not consulted, and experienced the atomic tests as ‘bright light then a black mist’. Panellist Karina Lester described how her father and others were blinded and their health impacted. Their land was polluted with radioactive craters. Indigenous people have a well-founded opposition to nuclear waste sites in their country.



Karina Lester speaks at the World Beyond War conference, while Bob Carr and Peter Cronau listen.

The AUKUS agreement is the most recent example which aligns Australia even more closely with the USA’s military empire. Australia has become more militarised and given over much of our sovereignty. At huge expense, we are purchasing nuclear submarines, building a port near Fremantle to cater for US nuclear submarines and allowing the expansion of US military bases. At Pine Gap additional satellite dishes have been erected in order to increase its capacity for surveillance and spying. The Darwin airstrip is being extended to enable B52 bombers with nuclear bomb capacity to land. Other air strips are being developed as alternative sites should a war with China erupt. Dr Albert Palazzo described how our alliance makes our cities, ports and airports potential targets.

¹ Panellists included First Nations representatives Karina Lester and Ray Minniecon, former Foreign Minister Bob Carr, journalist Peter Cronau, Dr Sue Wareham from the Medical Association for the Prevention of War, Lilli Barto from Wage Peace and defence analyst Dr Albert Palazzo.

Australians are not told about these developments, about the movement of nuclear material within Australia or what takes place in Pine Gap. We are willingly being absorbed into the weapons industry led by the US, with no control over how and where our contribution is used.

The military are also infiltrating our education system from primary to tertiary education. Dr Sue Wareham detailed how weapons companies ensure students are repeatedly exposed to their brand names, providing materials, sponsorships and camps. They entice the best students into their industry, and thus away from areas such as health and the environment, presenting it as glamorous and fun. Teachers and others are opposing this militarisation of education, arguing that weapons companies, like those selling alcohol, tobacco or gambling, are not suitable education partners. There is debate at present in regard to universities receiving funding from the military.

The Australian media and governments do not question the Australia-USA military alliance. Peter Cronau and Bob Carr described how our national fear and felt need for a protector result in the conventional wisdom always to go with the USA's military empire. We are a loyal and trustworthy ally. We defer to US policy. We do not question the military effect on the environment, on our economy, or our people.

How do we build a different future? There are things we can do. We can nurture the idea of détente rather than military posturing. We can be willing to build relations with other nations, including China, and caution the USA and its military enterprise and empire. We can get more information about the USA's bases in Australia and be ready to just say no to them. We can challenge weapons companies in their involvement in our education system. Indigenous voices, with their experience of two layers of colonisation and empire, should be heard by our leaders.

We should exercise our sovereignty as an independent nation rather than feel we need a big brother to protect us. We can become less fearful of the outsider and insecure, and no longer give uncritical support to the USA's military empire. Instead, we could become neutral and non-aligned. We should broaden our national security policy so that it is not only a matter of the military. We can foster more cultural awareness and look to diplomacy and non-violent means to resolve conflicts. As Ray Minniecon and others observed, we can be secure without first resort to military solutions.

We can get comfortable with our own nationality, acknowledging the truth about our past and present, and looking to where we want to go and be in the future. We could become a republic, overcome our fear and embrace what it means to be neutral. White Australia needs to become more uncomfortable with its actions in order to change for the better.

As activists, we need more than a communications strategy. We need to understand what our objectives are, who we are targeting and how to get there. Lilli Barto gave a compelling case for the importance of direct action to achieve change, with simple guiding principles: do no harm to other living things and respect the actions of other activists. We can be open to more ways of direct action and having an influence.

Raising Peace runs a festival of talks each year around the International Day of Peace, of which the NoWar2024 conference was one part. Many of our other sessions this year explored the importance of a peace oriented mindset. It is clear that resolving conflict peacefully will be better achieved by people who understand that peace is not an abstract idea: it is achievable through different ways of thinking, courage and hard work.

History does have surprises. Change can come about suddenly. There is hope.