

The Causes and Costs of War

Address to the Unitarian Peace Memorial Church, Easter Sunday, 24 April 2011

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Thank you for inviting me to address you today.

My organisation draws its membership from the health care community; particularly, but certainly not exclusively, physicians; and we are the Australian affiliate of an international organisation called IPPNW, International Physicians For The Prevention Of Nuclear War. We warmly welcome anyone to become a member.

IPPNW was spawned around 1980 by a group of physicians deeply concerned about nuclear weapons and the arms race. In particular there were two cardiologists, Bernard Lown from Harvard in the U.S. and Dr Yevgeny Chasov, physician to Soviet leaders in his era, who developed a friendship; and then with others including Australian Helen Caldicott, challenged the doctrine of nuclear deterrence, or MAD, (mutually assured destruction) as justification for nuclear weapons. They helped to precipitate the end of the Cold War, and IPPNW was awarded the Nobel Peace prize in 1985.

From these origins, nuclear weapons are very much at the heart of MAPW's work, and in recent years we grew a campaign which is now a separate organisation called ICAN, (International Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons) which focuses entirely on nuclear disarmament. However we are concerned about all aspects of war prevention, and have done work on cluster munitions, small arms, nonviolent conflict resolution, Australia in the Middle East conflicts, militarism, and have increasingly worked with teachers to get these matters into the schoolroom and university lecture theatres.

Recently we produced a booklet called *Vision 2030*, which addresses the Australian Federal Governments 2009 Defence White Paper, a projection of Australia's security needs which was disappointing in its militaristic approach to security, and its proposition that Australia should rely on being under the nuclear umbrella provided by the US for at least another 20 years.

Today is Easter Sunday, a day to contemplate and celebrate for Christians, and a good time to talk about peace. Tomorrow is Anzac Day, a day when an awful lot seems to go on in Australia these days, but probably not enough contemplation of the true horror of war and more importantly how to prevent it.

The causes of war

This is a huge subject which always inspires much debate. Is it always deep down about territory and access to resources held within them, or are some wars just triggered by conflict between different tribes or states over differences in religious or political views, or lack of respect for the human rights of each others people? We know that the stress of poverty and deprivation can lead to violent conflict, and that alleviation of these can help to make societies more peaceful. We can also be sure that the stresses on peoples produced by the rapidly human-induced change in the climate will lead to many more people being deprived of resources like food and fresh water, thus becoming homeless and on the move within their own countries or across national boundaries, which our climate and natural systems of course pay no heed to.

And we can also have no doubt that the reasons given for propagation of war are very often dishonest: as the saying goes "The first casualty of war is truth". A recent obvious example of this was the stated

threat of WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction) as a justification for the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which later was shown to be an unjustified belief at best, and probably an outright deceit. The British Government has seen fit to investigate this false premise for involvement in a war with the Chilcot inquiry, while our own government ignores calls for an examination of how and why we became involved in such a deceitful and destructive exercise. Even the question of who should be authorised to send Australian troops to war has not been addressed, despite best efforts of Senator Scott Ludlam and others before him to ensure that the approval of the whole parliament is given before our troops are committed to war.

If this war was necessary to prevent Iraq having the bomb, the United Nations should have been the body to decide that this last resort was needed, and the UN was arguing for restraint. It seems that the country with the biggest economy and the most military might just goes ahead alone, especially when it comes to matters of control of resources it needs to keep being the country with the most, and Australia was prepared to go along with them.

The cost of war.

The human cost of war is enormous and manifold. Soldiers die in wars, that's what war is, killing - mostly of young men - by each other: or they are permanently damaged mentally and physically, and that damage affects the people they live with and their descendents for several generations. Their organic injuries are physical, chemical, radioactive (depleted uranium, nuclear weapons) and their mental injuries are of a variety and complexity that the current term "post-traumatic-stress-disorder" does nothing to describe.

But increasingly civilians suffer similar consequences. The Second World War was the first that targeting of civilians happened on a massive scale, and the terror that this provoked was used as a weapon of war. The Germans bombed London repeatedly. The bombing of Dresden, which killed at least 25,000 people, was aimed to turn the German peoples mind against the own leader, Hitler, but needless to say it failed. Hamburg was bombed, killing 50,000.

Later, using atomic weapons for the first and only time in war, the US bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, each time causing a monstrous fireball over the centre of the cities, immediately killing 160,000 and 80,000 people with many more dying in the days and months that followed. Decades and generations later, cancer and genetic abnormalities cause disease and premature death for many.

Since then civilians have been victims in all wars, from civil to state sponsored to terrorist activities.

And civilians suffer through deliberate targeting of infrastructure such as hospitals and water treatment plants, food supply lines, and the now widespread use of weapons like cluster bombs and land mines which lie in wait unexploded: for example in Lebanon, where several million were dropped in populated areas in the last few days of the 2006 Israeli war with Hezbollah, even after a resolution to the conflict was already determined. These small packages of bomblets continue to cause death and limb injuries on a weekly basis for farmers and their children, and make large areas of agricultural land inaccessible for food production. (Incidentally I understand from talking to a man who worked on them that the prototypes of these little killers were developed right here in Port Melbourne around thirty years ago.)

War and the environment

This brings us to the **environmental costs of war**. The military machinery used requires huge amounts of energy to make and fossil fuel burning to run. War contributes a considerable amount to climate change. But the deliberate destruction of oil rigs, the land mines and cluster bombs, the contamination

of soil with depleted uranium and the destruction of forests with chemicals all have their devastating effects on the environment that humans and other living things need to survive.

Perhaps the only academic estimate of the carbon footprint of an atomic war concluded that even a 'small nuclear exchange' of just fifty 15-kilotonne warheads would cause 690 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions through the burning of cities – more than the current annual emissions of the UK.

But a war doesn't need to be nuclear to have a large carbon footprint. Extrapolating from the carbon intensity of the health and defence industries in the UK, it's possible to have a rough stab at converting this expenditure into carbon. This approach suggests that the US military operation in Iraq may have clocked up around 160–500 million tonnes of CO₂, plus a further 80 million tonnes for the healthcare of troops. That's considerable though it is only 10% of the United States annual carbon output.

What about the financial cost?

Currently the world spends \$1.53 trillion dollars on defence, 43% of this spent by one country, the so-called world's policeman, the United States. That's huge. That's 1.5 trillion dollars. **The financial cost of the US military operation in Iraq since 2003 has been estimated at \$1.3 trillion, with a further \$600 billion anticipated for the lifetime healthcare costs of injured troops.** And much of it is being paid to rich weapons producers, who have very strong links to government.

The increasingly the weapons industry is commercialised and integrated in our society. **Weapons manufacturers sponsor universities not only in the United States where the majority of scientific research is defence linked, but are starting to in schools and universities in this country also.** Just to cite a local example of this unhealthy link, not to say conflict of interest, the aforementioned Defence White paper community consultations were chaired by Stephen Loosely, who is a board member of Thales Australia, a major weapons manufacturer. An arms fair for these weapons traders to flaunt their wares, organised by the Asia Pacific Defence and Security Exhibition was planned for Adelaide in 2008. The opening date was Nov 11th, Remembrance day. MAPW and others campaigned against this gruesome event, and it was cancelled. Ironically the SA government cited fear of violence from demonstrators as the reason.

Just contemplate for a moment what that defence spending might be taking money away from. Real commitment to renewable energy, a cure for malaria, clean water supplies for Africa and so on.

In 2000 the UN set out the Millennium Development Goals. Their aims were to encourage development and improve the social and economic conditions in the world's poorest countries. All world leaders signed on the declaration from which they were derived. There are 8 broad goals, covering education, food supply, disease prevention, maternal health, and environmental sustainability. The changes brought about by achieving these goals would not only improve quality of life but also improve security and reduce the likelihood of civil and interstate conflict considerably. Measurable targets were set, for achievement by 2015. Of course this will require a huge amount of finance. Not surprisingly many wealthy countries have not kept their promises of funds. But how much *would* it cost?

The Stockholm based International Peace Research Institute estimated with a careful study that achieving these goals would cost \$135 billion. That's ONE TENTH OF THE MILITARY SPENDING ON THE WHOLE PLANET IN ONE YEAR.

Commemorating war

And finally a word about tomorrow, Anzac Day. There is nothing wrong with commemorating regularly and soberly the people who died and suffered while fighting in wars, in fact it right that we

should do so. There's something not right about the way Anzac Day has become the day on which we base our national identity, defining it by how our soldiers perform in a theatre of war. This is a trend to simplify and glamorise these people's lives and deaths. Space is not made in Anzac Day ceremonies for the voices of those who suffered and continue to suffer, from those and subsequent wars. No mention is made of the wars between European Settlers and Aboriginal people defending their lands and rights against the invaders. Little is said of the need to prevent future wars and the suffering they cause.

Australia has many war memorials. The biggest and best known is in Canberra, our national capital, which is fitting; a large classical building which is sited in a direct line with Parliament House. There are 3 dozen other war memorials in Canberra alone. There are war memorials in every town and village in the country from which soldiers were drawn to their deaths in WW1 and WW2. These are also appropriate, arguably more than any others. And yet there is a proposal to build two enormous granite towers, in the line of sight between the current national War Memorial and Parliament House, and dominating the landscape of one of Canberra's most beautiful areas for recreation and relaxation. One is to represent WW1 and the other WW2, and they will cost \$20 million. MAPW and others have protested against this plan, to spend tax payers' money on yet another physical structure commemorating war.

When the then Governor- General Lord Gowrie opened the Australian War Memorial in 1941, during the Second World War, he said ...that the memorial would be ... *“not only a record of the splendid achievements of the men that fought and fell in the war”*, but that it would also be *“a reminder to future generations of the barbarity, of the utter futility of modern war.”*

I think we have plenty of the former but are currently in need of a good deal more of the latter on this Easter Day, tomorrow's Anzac Day and every other day of our lives, lest we forget the true nature of war.

Once again, thank you for inviting me to share a few thoughts with you today.