

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



# Australian Sovereignty and the Path to Peace

## 2025 Carmichael Lecture

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### DOUG CAMERON

#### Acknowledgements

I want to pay my respects to the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung people of the Kulin nation.

I also want to thank the Carmichael Centre and the staff who worked so hard to make this lecture possible.

It is a great privilege to have been invited to deliver the annual Carmichael lecture in honour of my late friend, colleague and mentor Laurie Carmichael, working-class hero, public intellectual, unionist, peace activist, educator and great Australian.

Working-class Australians have been the beneficiaries of Laurie's lifelong determination to improve education, wages, and working conditions by building a good society in a peaceful world.

At a time when powerful domestic and international forces dominate the debate on the future of our defence capabilities, it is timely to critically analyse Australia's political and industrial capitulation to militarism and warmongering – disguised as defending Australia.

Our parliamentarians have engaged in a combination of wrongheaded and dangerous political decisions, with little transparency and even less accountability.

The Albanese government remains deeply invested in AUKUS. The UK has dreams of a new AUKUS class submarine at a time when its construction facilities and workforce are in decline. If the dreamboat follows the downward trajectory of Astute and Vanguard, and probably Dreadnought, it will never materialise.

At the rate that UK submarine maintenance and construction is going, the Yarra will turn crystal clear before the AUKUS submarine even hits the drawing board.

We know that the entire AUKUS idea is in deep trouble in America too.

The American shipyards need massive expansion and significant workforce growth just to meet America's own plans for its submarine force. Weighing in at over twenty thousand tonnes, none of the new Columbia class ballistic missile submarines have been completed yet. They remain the top priority however.

The next model of the Virginia class attack submarines, which will put on real weight as they grow from seven thousand tonnes to ten thousand tonnes, have also not yet begun construction.

Recent Congressional reports and evidence to Congressional committees tell us that America has to double its rate of submarine construction just to meet its own needs.

Australia's come a distant second, if we come anywhere at all.

Foreign influenced security "think tanks", usually funded by Defence industry companies that stand to make huge profits out of Australia's naivety, have been dedicated to justifying profligate government expenditure on nuclear-powered attack submarines.

The design of which is predicated on defending against nuclear attacks by states with nuclear weapons.

These submarines will lock us into the warlike activities of Nuclear Weapon States.

This totally defeats any disarmament or arms control logic.

It is a complete repudiation of decades of Australian anti-nuclear weapons policy.

Labor is junking its own policy heritage.

The mainstream media is determined to shape public debate in support of militarism.

Some try-hard academics spend their intellectual capital on justifying increased military expenditure at the expense of building a good society.

Together, they are a great threat to our sovereignty and peaceful existence.

An example of the media's determination to attack, marginalise and delegitimise those who seek to improve dialogue with China is the hysterical response to Bob Carr and Dan Andrews attendance at the Chinese celebrations to mark Japan's defeat in World War II 80 years ago.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH) linked Andrews with Putin and Kim while describing them as pariahs in the West due to the war in Ukraine and Kim's nuclear ambitions.

Andrews is the politician that the media love to hate.

He kept on winning elections, however, which tells us what the voters thought. Someone's wrong here, and it's not the voters. The conservative-aligned media seem only to know about backing losers.

Surely, we should be advocating for a deeper bilateral engagement with China. We cannot deal with the rise of China by ignoring it.

Rather, we need to talk to China, seriously and often. It would have been appropriate, and in the national interest, for ministers to attend the celebration in recognition of the importance of the defeat of Japan and diplomacy in avoiding future wars.

Even Tony Abbott sent a Minister to previous Chinese celebrations to mark the Japanese defeat.

Too many of our current parliamentarians have no experience and even less idea of the horrors inflicted on working-class people when diplomacy and peace give way to war.

The peoples of Palestine and Ukraine show us the horrors of war every day.

As a child growing up in the 50s in Scotland, I witnessed the devastation that the Second World War brought on my family, my father and thousands of physically and mentally scarred working-class returned soldiers.

Many Australian families experienced similar physical, mental and addiction issues that plagued returned soldiers.

It will be working-class families and their communities who pay the price as mind-boggling amounts of public funds are expended on subsidising the US and UK military industrial complexes.

Too many Australian politicians have capitulated to the rhetoric and myth of “peace through strength” and promulgate the lie that militarism and the increasingly unreliable US alliance will make us safer.

History demonstrates that this is naïve, partisan nonsense.

The sentiments of President Franklin D Roosevelt in his “I hate war” speech of 14 August 1936 should be at front of mind of every Australian politician. Roosevelt said:

“I have seen war. I have seen war on land and sea. I have seen blood running from the wounded. I have seen men coughing out their gassed lungs. I have seen the dead in the mud. I have seen cities destroyed. I have seen 200 limping exhausted men come out of line – the survivors of a regiment of 1000 that went forward 48 hours before. I have seen children starving I have seen the agony of mothers and wives. I hate war.”

The deadly implications of militarism, war and fear that the Nazis could develop a nuclear bomb before the US demonstrated that even politicians with a clear understanding of the agony of war will react to an arms race by sanctioning the development of nuclear weapons.

Shortly after Roosevelt’s death the United States ruthlessly unleashed atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

I have been to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park and Museum.

The Hiroshima Museum tells a bleak and horrifying story of inhumanity and the implications of nuclear war.

It is a warning to those who think we should turn a blind eye to US and UK nuclear armed submarines and bombers using Australian bases to attack China.

Many security analysts have legitimate fears that military, containment and confrontation of China will lead to nuclear war.

I do not understand what has happened to my party, the Australian Labor Party.

I do not understand why a party, with a long history of anti-nuclear activism, can abandon its integrity, its history and its credibility by capitulating to militarism within 24 hours of learning about the AUKUS deal.

Why would we expose our nation, our communities, to becoming nuclear targets in order to support US military adventurism in pursuit of hegemony in a war that it can never win?

And even if it could win, why would we support the mega-deaths such a victory would entail?

Why are we abandoning the principle of peace in a desperate effort to hopefully obtain second-hand nuclear-powered submarines decades from now?

These submarines are designed to attack our most important trading partner China, in an effort to maintain US hegemony and military superiority.

Why are we pouring billions of dollars into the construction of a submarine base in Western Australia to accommodate American nuclear-powered and nuclear-armed submarines in defiance of the long-held practice of keeping nuclear weapons off Australian soil?

Not one cabinet minister will publicly concede this truth.

The Trump regime and the US military have no compunction in asserting that the military build-up in our region is to constrain and deter China.

There was no justification for the then Albanese opposition to have put their quest for the government benches before the party's long-standing opposition to nuclear weapons and its principled quest for peace.

In my opinion, the Australian electorate would have supported them.

There was no need to abandon our enduring principles.

This was an unnecessary and politically inept capitulation.

There is even less justification that, after winning government, we failed to critically analyse the geopolitical and economic and implications for peace of this flawed, dangerous and increasingly uncertain madness that is AUKUS and the Force Posture Agreement.

AUKUS, along with the Force Posture Agreement, diminishes our sovereignty, and increases the likelihood that we will be dragged into a war with China over Taiwan.

I never thought the party of Chifley, Evatt, Whitlam, Keating, Crean, Uren, Cairns, Murphy and Evans would abandon our sovereignty to the United States.

I am even more bewildered that the Labor Party with such a massive majority in Parliament would resort to word games about having undertaken a serious review of AUKUS and why so many of my former colleagues have been mute, intimidated and acquiescent.

Where are the peace activists in the caucus?

More to the point, where are the local members working to look after the well-being and prosperity of their voters while billions are poured into the pockets of weapons manufacturers, lobbyists and former politicians?

Why have the ministers who once marched shoulder to shoulder with Tom Uren at Palm Sunday peace marches abandoned their principles?

Why have those on left of the party rejected common sense, and long-held values to fall in line and support US hegemony and imperialism?

Why have progressive parliamentarians and activists who have a history and culture of organising and campaigning and marching against US military aggression in Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, Afghanistan and Iran lost their voice, their courage and their commitment?

Why has the left caucus failed to uphold its historic role for peace; why are they missing in action on AUKUS, Palestine and US support for Netanyahu?

Why has the left caucus failed to support Keating, Carr, Evans and even Malcolm Turnbull in their opposition to AUKUS?

Why are they deaf to the ever-increasing evidence that AUKUS and the Force Posture Agreement are not in Australia's interest and increase the potential for devastating nuclear conflict?

Why has the parliamentary left allowed themselves to be defanged and co-opted into supporting US military aggression?

Caucus solidarity must never come before opposition to war, genocide and starvation of innocent civilians in Gaza.

Caucus solidarity did not prevail when the left vocally and successfully opposed the testing of MX missiles in 1985.

Ten members of the left refused to support a parliamentary vote on approving MX missile testing.

The left parliamentary caucus used to reflect the views of the progressive rank-and-file; they acted as the party's conscience. Those days seem to be long gone.

You would be aware that opposition to AUKUS is growing within the ALP rank-and-file and branches.

I was intrigued to read the Ross Gittins article of 3 September in the *SMH* where he says:

"These days, there's no great ideological divide between Labor's Left and Right factions. As one of the Left's luminaries explained to me, these days they're just rival management teams".

Surely the left leadership must see itself as more than part of the management team.

Surely the left must articulate and fight for the progressive policies and principles that the rank-and-file of the party elected them to pursue.

Labor against War, of which I am joint patron with former Labor Minister Margaret Reynolds, has been a focus for rank-and-file members to discuss their concerns and opposition to AUKUS and to the Force Posture Agreement.

At the recent Victorian State Conference, delegates voted, consistent with Labor against War policy, to call on the party to establish an independent parliamentary inquiry into AUKUS with full terms of reference.

The conference called on the government to suspend participation in AUKUS and the funding of US shipyards pending the outcome of the inquiry.

This was despite frenzied opposition to the resolutions from ministerial offices and Albo's left praetorian guard.

It is dangerous when the parliamentary executive becomes increasingly out of touch with the party rank-and-file.

This disconnect between the executive and rank-and-file will continue to grow as the leadership concedes our sovereignty by deeper integration into the US war machine.

How crazy is it that our government ignores a basic human right to housing, champions market-based “solutions” and home ownership while disregarding the lessons of the past that a housing commission is a proven solution to unaffordable housing for working-class Australians?

At the very time the availability of social housing is declining, under the Force Posture Agreement, Australia is funding public housing for United States Armed Forces personnel in Western Australia.

This is militarism gone mad.

America is attempting to build countervailing regional groups such as the QUAD and AUKUS to contain China and to maintain US military and geopolitical superiority.

And isn't this going well?

There's Modi and Putin taking a nice stroll in Beijing with President Xi as Trump creates a world that is the antithesis of the American dream.

We must ensure that we never become a United States proxy in a war with China.

Look at the implications and devastation in Ukraine as the US and Europe and NATO increasingly fund the Ukrainian military.

If my party were genuine in the pursuit of order, stability, and peace we would not be funding the US and UK military industrial complex.

If we were genuine in pursuing peace, we would be increasing our diplomacy, seeking compromise and accommodations and arguing that there can be no winners in a conflict with China that could lead to the use of weapons of mass destruction.

It is time that we stop the simplistic claptrap promoted by the Labor cabinet and promulgated by its defence ministers that “detering war through strength promotes peace”.

While we are offering a bit of corrective therapy, it is about time that the government stopped hawking the defence industry as a job creation program.

It's not. It's a job swapping program at best and a job destruction program at worst as investment in an arms race crowds out genuinely productive, and socially beneficial manufacturing investment in areas such as modular housing, transport systems and advanced manufacturing.

We must be more sophisticated, analytical and truthful when it comes to our relationship with the United States.



The Australian government should stop claiming to be a middle power trying to uphold a rules-based international order; we are acting as a sub-imperial power upholding a U.S.-led imperial order.

A sub-imperial power is a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state effectively controls the political sovereignty of others. Australia is an active, eager participant in the US-led order.

The rules-based international order that our government is so eager to promote is not an inclusive order created for the benefit of humanity.

It does not mean a peaceful and harmonious system.

It is about power politics by procedural means.

It entrenches the power of the powerful and is designed to exclude and subdue their rivals.

The global South continues to live on the edge.

So, when the government leadership waxes lyrical about the rules-based order and the need to deter war through strength, take note of America's continued failure in that regard.

Professor Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University has closely analysed what he describes as an abiding failure of American political culture.

He shows that almost every modern US military intervention in the developing world has come to what he describes as "rot".

He says it is hard to think of an exception since the Korean War.

In the 1960s and first half of the 1970s the US fought in Indochina – Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia eventually withdrawing in defeat after a decade of grotesque carnage.

These were resounding examples of the futility of peace through strength.

He references Chile in 1973, General Pinochet's murderous military junta overthrew Salvador Allende with US backing and how the US-installed dictators throughout Latin America and parts of Africa with disastrous consequences that lasted decades.

The US installed the Mobutu dictatorship in the Democratic Republic of the Congo after the CIA backed assassination of Patrice Lumumba in 1961.

In the 1980s, the US under Ronald Reagan ravaged Central America in proxy wars to forestall or topple leftist governments. The tradition continues with attempts to destabilise the progressive Lula government in Brazil.

The Middle East, Western Asia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Libya and US led Gulf War in 1992 are further examples of the futility of subjugating ourselves to militarism.

It is beyond belief that our political leadership could tie us so unequivocally to the US given its history of aggression, intervention and destabilisation that has resulted in its own humiliation and defeat.

I hope the US AUKUS review saves us from ourselves.

I am not optimistic about this given that we have conceded our sovereignty, dignity and safety to the Trump regime, a regime driven by an egotistical, temperamental, authoritarian and dangerous leader.

Regardless of political developments that might transpire in the future, the US seems determined to confront China, using Taiwan as a tripwire to war.

I never thought that National Conference delegates who expressed genuine, legitimate concerns about AUKUS would be attacked on the conference floor by a left-wing minister parroting Ronald Reagan who, at the 17 July 1980 Republican National Convention said:

“We know all too well that war comes not when the forces of freedom are strong, but when they are weak. It is then that tyrants are tempted.”

To hear a Labor minister morph into an antipodean clone of Ronald Reagan trumpeting “strength deters war, appeasement invites conflict” is more than disappointing: it is a denial of the left’s long pro-peace tradition.

This is such a simplistic, stupid and wrongheaded analysis.

Warmongering is in fashion. Just last week, in a crazy act of homage to the dogs of war, Pete Hegseth was renamed Secretary for War. In May this year, Hegseth said: “The region (Indo Pacific) is America’s priority, and the threat posed by China is real – and potentially imminent.”

Australia’s Defence Minister described this as “a very clear articulation of American intent, that what they seek is peace through strength”.

The spirit of Ronald Reagan is alive and well in the Labor Party cabinet.

What this really means is they seek peace by preparing for war. Just because some long-dead Roman thought it was a clever thing to say does not make it true. It just proves that stupidity has ancient roots.

We should stop using a flawed, lazy and inept analysis and stop parroting right-wing rhetoric in defence of the indefensible.

If you want peace, you should prepare for peace, not war.

The Australian defence minister also described AUKUS as moving beyond interoperability to interchangeability and ensuring that we have the enablers in place to operate seamlessly together at speed.

Against whom, China?

Does anyone really believe that in these circumstances our sovereignty will be protected, and Australian military chiefs will be dictating the strategy?

Does anyone in my party understand that the US cannot defeat China in a conventional war?

Has anyone in my party read Malcolm Fraser's 2014 book *Dangerous Allies* where he of all people, with great foresight, articulated the contemporary issues that face our nation and its relationship with China and the United States?

Fraser argues against the Menzies formulation of depending on "great and powerful friends".

He pre-empted our current dilemma and called for a rethink of the culture of strategic dependence on the USA.

He argued that the United States would not have the capabilities or the determination to defeat China and that if Australia allied ourselves with the US, they would eventually retreat back to the mainland America.

We would be left as defeated allies in a region dominated by China.

This is provided the world is not destroyed in a nuclear Armageddon.

What has happened to my party?

Where is the courage to do as Simon Crean did, at the National Press Club in Canberra on 20 March 2003 when, against fierce political and media support for the invasion, he opposed John Howard sending troops to Iraq.

Crean gave the following assurances to the Australian people.

- 1) As Prime Minister, I will never allow our policy to be determined by another country.
- 2) I will never commit to an unnecessary war while peace is possible.
- 3) And I will never send Australia's young men and women to war without telling them the truth.

These are enduring principles that should be adopted by the Albanese government.

In addition to this, Labor should:

- Publicly declare that it is not in Australia's national interest to engage in a war with China over Taiwan.
- Take urgent steps to identify alternatives to AUKUS and the Force Posture Agreement.
- Give notice to the United States and United Kingdom of our intention to end AUKUS and the Force Posture Agreement.
- Ensure we have genuine parliamentary oversight of defence and the security and intelligence services, and given the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security is toothless has no capacity for oversight of its activities, as in comparable democracies, PJCS powers must be urgently and significantly enhanced.
- Legislate for a parliamentary debate and determination prior to any declaration to have our military engage in conflict.
- Establish and fund a National Peace Research Institute to operate in parallel with the Diplomatic Academy at the Department of Foreign Affairs and the National Security College at the ANU. While we're at it, we should change the title of the ludicrously named Australian War College in the Department of Defence back to The Australian Defence College.
- Conduct a parliamentary inquiry into the implications of the revolving door of former parliamentarians, advisers, public servants and military personnel being employed by companies and institutions funded by or part of the global military/industrial complex. Come to think of it, we should apply this to the mining industry as well.
- Legislate to proscribe former parliamentarians, advisers, public servants and military personnel from being employed by arms manufacturers for a period of five years after they have left the Commonwealth payroll.
- Take steps to increase the density and complexity of our research, science and manufacturing sector with a view to improving our defence capacities and widening our industrial base.

- Reduce our dependence on US military equipment and technology.
- Increase political and diplomatic engagement with Asian Pacific nations, particularly China.
- Require the ABC to ensure commentators on defence issues divulge any conflict of interest, funding from or employment within the military industrial complex. Any such conflicts would be announced prior to appearances on ABC news or current affairs programs.

In conclusion, and in the Carmichael tradition, I call on Labor parliamentarians, the trade union movement rank-and-file activists and the public to educate themselves about the madness that is AUKUS, organise against militarism and build a campaign in support of peace, diplomacy and common sense.

Stop the warmongering and build a good society.