

Marrickville Peace Group

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The Hon. Anthony Albanese MP
334A Marrickville Road
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Dear Prime Minister

In the past members of MPG have had conversations about peace with you (at least one in your Marrickville Road office). We also recall that you spoke at the launch of an event the group organised in 2007, following the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Because of these incidents, the group is sure of your commitment to the cause of peace.

Recent developments lead us to have some questions on the topic that we now feel constrained to put to you.

Nuclear topics

We understand that Australia is planning to acquire nuclear-powered submarines (SSN's) under the 'AUKUS' agreement and that, also under this agreement, US submarines may use Australian port facilities. We further understand that there are plans to accommodate nuclear capable B52 bombers at Tindal RAAF Base in the Northern Territory. We acknowledge that Australian SSNs will not carry nuclear weapons. While we suspect that the USA will neither confirm nor deny whether their aircraft or submarines are nuclear-armed, they are certainly nuclear-capable.

It appears that Australia is becoming more comfortable with hosting nuclear platforms and is drawing closer to accepting their 'legitimacy'. To MPG this seems to run counter Australia's signed commitment to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as well as the ALP's pre-election promise to sign and ratify the Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Australia is also a signatory to the 1986 Treaty of Rarotonga. That Treaty appears violated in the abandonment of non-proliferation issues, which compromise Australia's obligations and goodwill toward its Pacific partners.

- How do you explain this departure from a long-standing policy of avoiding all things nuclear?
- Remembering that the Labor Party has committed itself to doing so, when will Australia sign and ratify the TPNW?
- What might be the ramification of ratifying the TPNW for the AUKUS agreement?

The possibility of conflict over Taiwan

The group is also deeply concerned about the prospect of Australia joining the USA in conflict against China, over the Taiwan issue. We recall the previous Minister for

Defence saying that it would be 'inevitable' that Australia would join the USA in such a scenario. On the other hand, ex-PM Paul Keating has clearly stated that Taiwan is not Australia's interest – meaning that we should not join in war over it. In the group's opinion, China is not an enemy and should not be viewed as one.

- Can you state categorically that Australia will not go to war against China over Taiwan?

War Powers

The Taiwan matter also raises a further one that has troubled MPG for many years. We are amazed that a democracy like Australia can, nevertheless, find itself at war without the necessity of any prior, parliamentary debate. MPG has been following the work of 'Australians for War Powers Reform' over many years. We are delighted that your government has initiated an inquiry into War Powers (to which MPG intends making a submission). We find Minister Marles remark that the status quo is adequate very hard to understand.

- Would you agree that the Australian Parliament is the appropriate body to make the final decision about sending of Australian forces into overseas conflicts?

The plight of Mr Julian Assange

MPG is also somewhat dismayed that your government has been so quiet on the matter of the continuing incarceration of Mr Julian Assange. We understand that his plight comes under the jurisdiction of British authorities, but there is no doubt that he is being held for political, rather than legal reasons. Nor is there any doubt that the political pressure is coming from the USA. It must be stressed that Mr Assange is an Australian citizen. The Australian government has a reputation for speaking up for its citizens held in overseas jails for political reasons.

- What is preventing you from speaking out publicly on the matter and calling for the charges against Mr Assange to be dropped?

Time is not on Mr Assange's side. His health is in jeopardy. If he dies in custody it will be a disaster – and he will have been, effectively, executed by legal process.

Could we meet?

Clearly, there are many matters that we would like to discuss with you, as members of your local constituency.

- Would you, please, agree to meet with us for such a discussion?

Sincerely

Nick Deane
On behalf of Marrickville Peace Group.