The Winds of Change are Blowing on the Wests Wars. Time to Recognise Reality.

The casual reader of the Australian mainstream media would be hard pressed to know that at the current time Australian troops are engaged in three different wars: Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.

They would be even harder pressed to discover any discussion of the validity of these three engagements. The fact that at least two of the three wars (Afghanistan and Iraq) were based on manifest lies would also be a concept that the mainstream media (newspapers, radio and television) did not trouble their readers viewers or listeners with.

There are a number of possible reasons for this virtual blackout, of varying degrees of credibility. The least credible is that the viewers/ readers/ or listeners do not care that Australian military personnel are engaged in three wars. There is certainly no evidence to support such a presumption.

The second reason is that the respective editors believe that the wars are something they (mis)informed their readers/listeners about when they began years before, and that nothing has happened of significance in the subsequent years to warrant an uptick in their courage. Again, one would struggle to find objective evidence to support such an assumption.

A third reason, and one probably closer to the truth, is that Australian troops fighting in the United States’ wars are the price Australia pays for the dubious benefits of United States “protection.” Insofar as the reason is ever proffered by the media, they cite the ANZUS treaty.

Judging by their comments, this argument is advanced by those who have never actually read the ANZUS treaty, or if they have preferred to conceal from the readers/listeners that it is in fact no more than a promise to consult in the event that one or other of its members is attacked.

The ANZUS treaty has so little practical effect that New Zealand’s withdrawal from it when the Lange government refused to allow nuclear armed ships within its territorial waters had no practical consequences. In the intervening nearly 3 decades since the New Zealand policy was implemented, it has neither been threatened nor invaded by any hostile power.

New Zealand’s relationship with its presumptive enemies in fact ranges from very good to excellent, as reflected in multiple symbols from trade figures to social, economic and cultural exchanges. New Zealand also has a large number of foreign students from countries that allegedly pose a risk to their security. The same is even truer of Australia.

Australia’s foreign policy role as essentially the 51st United States State is not even the topic of serious discussion, let alone disagreement between its two major parties. One will hunt in vain for any major foreign policy pronouncements by the official Opposition Labor Party that differs in its slavish adherence to United States foreign policy wishes.

What is perhaps more astonishing is that one will search the pages of Hansard for any serious evidence of foreign policy debate largely in vain. That a country can be at war for more than 18 years (Afghanistan) 16 years (Iraq) and four years (Syria) without being the subject of critical scrutiny in the parliament and elsewhere is beyond belief.

The listener/reader about the ongoing Afghanistan war is occasionally told that Australia is training Afghan troops. If this is indeed true, however doubtful the veracity of the claim, it must rank as a spectacularly unsuccessful project. The Taliban, Afghanistan’s government before the illegal invasion in 2001, now controls more territory than at any time since the 2001 invasion displaced them.

The true role of Australian troops in Afghanistan is rarely discussed in the mainstream media. Perhaps its role as a
major supporter of the United States control and exporting of Afghanistan’s major crop product, heroin, is not for discussion. Or Afghanistan’s possession of a range of rare minerals essential to a modern industrial society. Or that its multiple borders with China and former States of the USSR, or current arch enemy Iran, is of more than casual interest to the American war machine.

The 2003 invasion of Iraq was based on a different set of lies: that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction that posed an existential threat to the world’s major undeclared nuclear power, Israel.

The truth revealing that particular lie was rapidly exposed. Did the United States and its loyal allies like Australia say, oops, sorry, our mistake, we will leave now and pay for the damage and destruction? Not a word of it. They not only stayed; they stole Iraq’s oil resources while doing so. When Iraq’s government unanimously passed a resolution in January 2020 that all foreign troops must leave, did the occupiers pack their bags? Again, foolish question. The American Secretary of State literally laughed at the suggestion. His president demanded a huge payment to even consider leaving.

Trump’s demand was that the United States would retain Iraq’s financial resources held in United States banks and in an additional adding of insult to injury, the United States would keep a half of all future Iraqi oil revenue. When the Iraqi government refused and opened negotiations with China, who unsurprisingly offered vastly better arrangements, Trump literally threatened to kill the Iraqi Prime Minister. Little or none of this was reported in the Australian media.

The Australian response to the Iraqi demand that they pack up and leave was to pretend that the demand hadn’t been made, but if it had been, then the Iraqi government didn’t really mean it. The net result thus far is that the Australian troops (all on diplomatic passports) are still there. The Labor Party did the Australian government the courtesy of not even commenting on the Iraqi demand, let alone acknowledging that a sovereign government has the right to decide who stays or goes from its territory.

With Syria, the Australian government has obviously decided that the less said the better. Australian fighter planes were assisting United States forces in their alleged combating of terrorist groups fighting the Syrian government. The word “government” is used advisedly. It is the internationally recognised government of Syria, holding Syria’s seat in the United Nations General Assembly and multiple other international organisations.

The use by the Australian government of the epithet “Syrian regime” is a none too subtle form of deprecation, designed to diminish its legitimacy. If one or more of the various terrorist groups fighting the Syrian government were to actually win, would the United States, Australia et al continue to use the epithet of regime? One suspect not.

The facts on the ground in both Syria and Iraq have continued to change rapidly in their respective governments favour, thanks in no small part to the intervention of Hezbollah, Iranian and Russian military forces. The single dominant fact that distinguishes those latter three forces from the United States, Australia and their allies, is that their presence is legal under international law, welcomed by the host nation’s governments for both their assistance and their effectiveness.

Given that the Americans have never voluntarily left a country where they were not welcome, it would be unwise to predict the imminent departure of the Americans and their loyal support teams from Australia and elsewhere from either Iraq or Syria. But as Iran has recently demonstrated, the balance is rapidly shifting in favour of the respective nations who have suffered the illegal and unwanted intervention of the United States and its allies for too long and for little or no benefit.

*James O’Neill, an Australian-based Barrister at Law, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”.*