

PADRE'S Corner

Let Us Make Peace, Not War

by Padre Gary Stone OAM



As Remembrance Day approaches, it is timely to reflect on our nation's involvement in war, mindful of past and present conflict in the Middle East and elsewhere. Many people hold opinions about these, conflicts but far fewer possess on the ground experience, cultural understanding, and strategic insight. Drawing on almost 5 decades of service, I hope to illuminate the background to current events and the immense challenge of

restoring a peace that requires not only an end to violence but also justice, freedom, and renewed relationships. I appeal that we no longer commit our troops to missions with no strategic end-state, nor tactics that violate the concepts of "Just War", and focus on "peacemaking".

My perspective comes from 24 years as an infantry officer, including strategic work in the ADF Command Centre, followed by 24 years as a Padre and 10 further years helping victims of violence. I have served in seven conflicts, including leading the Australian contingent of UNIIMOG III in Iran and Iraq in 1989–90 to implement a UN brokered ceasefire. I have travelled widely through the region and observed world events closely for forty years.

Like many Australians, including my sons, I am proud to have been both a peacemaker and peacekeeper, responding to conflicts initiated by others. Australians have earned deep respect in UN and multinational missions. I was prepared to fight when necessary to defend our nation, but my training reinforced that lethal force must be used only as a last resort, always humanely, lawfully, and with the

restoration of peace as the ultimate aim. Our Government's commitment to US led missions in Afghanistan and Iraq has not met all of these criteria. Indeed, our Government's knowingly endorsed a US directed, targeted campaign of assassinations, that now embroils us in war crimes and has left many soldiers with extreme "moral injury".

Australian strategist Dr David Kilcullen, in *The Art of War and Peace*, argues that some Western nations have repeatedly failed, by winning battles, but losing peace. He stresses the need to align diplomatic, economic, and military strategies toward achievable peaceful outcomes and to not engage in unwinnable conflicts. Sure we must defend our nation, but in choosing to engage in conflict, begin with the end in mind.

Gaza, Iran and Lebanon have been bombed relentlessly with no satisfactory outcome. US Secretary of "War", Pete Hegseth boasts of "showing no mercy, nor following of



rules of engagement.” Millions of innocent people remain displaced, starving, and without hope. Indiscriminate and disproportionate use of violence has united previously divided groups in the Middle East into resentment and resistance. Donald Trump boasts of his consideration to “Annihilate Iran.” As I witness this, I cannot help but feel that God must weep at what humanity has become.

As a veteran and student of war and peace, I despair that the rules based order, international law, and the doctrine of “Just War” have been disregarded by our closest ally and by Israel. Leaders in both nations act unilaterally, without global consensus or any sustainable end state. Their actions cause immense suffering and provoke retaliation, destabilising global energy supplies and economic systems.

Iran has endured decades of foreign interference. Though many despair of their own fundamentalist government, they fought fiercely for eight years against Iraq’s unjust invasion, suffering one million casualties. The UN brokered ceasefire in 1988 allowed UNIIMOG, including my contingent, to help facilitate a transition to peace that largely endured until recent years.

In 2003, while I served at HQ 7 Brigade, the US invaded Iraq. I wrote a public article, which was circulated extensively, including by the Vatican, urging Australia not to join the invasion both on strategic and ethical grounds, warning of catastrophic consequences. The war proceeded, and its outcomes were even worse than expected: hundreds of thousands killed, and the Middle East plunged into anarchy. I transferred to the Army Reserve in protest at this unjust action, and was also asked to join the AFP as a Padre.

Re reading that article today, I see that our US ally has learned little from Vietnam, Iraq, or Afghanistan. It continues to believe overwhelming violence can reshape the Middle East. Just war doctrine—developed by St Augustine and refined over centuries—requires war to be a last resort, undertaken only when grave danger is imminent and all other options have failed. Actions in conflict must be discriminate and proportionate, must have a reasonable chance of success, and must not create greater evils than those they seek to eliminate. After conflict, justice and restoration must follow.

Although we cannot directly stop the current violence, we can refuse to endorse it, or participate in it. We can pray for peace, promote dialogue, and ensure Australia is not drawn into offensive operations. Knowing Palestinians and Iranians as I do, there will be no “unconditional surrender.” Their honour and national identity are at stake, and they will resist what they perceive as Western imperialism.

I am grateful that Pope Leo has called strongly for ceasefires and renewed dialogue. Many Australians, unfamiliar with war, may believe current US and Israeli actions protect us from future conflict. Certainly, all nations have the right to self defence. But what we are witnessing



Michael and Gary Stone – Timor Anzac Day 2024

goes far beyond what is just or reasonable. The US and Israel have acted with disproportionate violence, without a long term strategy or defined end state, and the world is suffering the consequences. Unlimited war is not the solution.

We must advocate for peace, uphold international law, and resist polarisation within our own society. One of my most treasured possessions is a Christian cross given to me by an Iranian intelligence officer (pictured with me opposite) who told me, “We have watched you work hard to bring lasting peace and justice for our people... Thankyou, you are our true brother in the family of God.”

May Jesus, the Prince of Peace, guide us to be Peacemakers.



Gary had a career as an Infantry Officer before being ordained in the Catholic Church as a married Deacon in December 1994, for chaplaincy to the Army and later the Federal Police.

Seeing operational service in Malaysia, Fiji, Iran, Iraq, Timor, Solomons and Bougainville.

Gary has been married to Lynne for over 51 years and they have four adult children, two of whom are Veterans as well. Gary and Lynne live near Mt Tamborine Qld.

Gary currently serves as chaplain for ex service people and their families in SE Queensland. He founded the Veterans Care Association in 2014 to facilitate the delivery of holistic health programmes that includes spiritually based pastoral care to rehabilitate veterans and support their families. He was awarded an OAM in 2020 for his service to veterans and the people of Timor Leste.