Nuclear armed and nuclear powered warships visit Australia regularly. These warships and their weapons are as much a threat to the world as Cruise and SS 20 missiles in Europe. This is Project Iceberg's first publication designed to inform people about the importance of the issue of warships and to encourage opposition to their presence in the region.

NUCLEAR WARSHIPS. WHY ARE THEY HERE?

When the first atomic bombs massacred the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, military forces dominated the entire Pacific. Since then the Asia / Pacific region has been the site of continual confrontation between the two major superpowers. Australia is part of that confrontation.

US AND SOVIET FORCES

In comparing the position of the two major competitors in the arms race it is important to remember their differences. Historically Soviet forces in the East have been mostly land-based. American forces have been sea based, supported by hundreds of bases in foreign nations, long distances from the US mainland, effectively making the Pacific an American lake.

Both the Americans and the Soviets deploy intercontinental nuclear weapons on board submarines in the Pacific Ocean. Both are increasing the number and sophistication of the submarines and the weapons: the USSR with the Typhoon, the US with the Trident. A conservative estimate of the number of these strategic nuclear weapons would be about 2000.

The build-up of the navy under Reagan has centred around aircraft carrier task forces, "designed primarily for offensive force projection against Soviet land targets - among other things - to cripple the Soviet Navy in its home port" (Secretary of the Navy John Lehman). The US Pacific forces will soon receive the majority of the 1800 Cruise missiles now on order to be carried by B-52G bombers at Guam and the ships of the Seventh Fleet.

The Navy is the one branch of the nuclear forces where the US is not seriously matched by the USSR. Soviet Naval forces are concentrated on Vladivostok which leaves them at a great disadvantage because they must pass through narrow straits controlled by Japanese and US forces. Even with the increased use of facilities in Vietnam and the deployment of one large aircraft carrier "they cannot hope to mount a direct challenge to the US Navy" (Armed Forces Journal).

AUSTRALIA'S PLACE IN THE WAR

Since World War II Australia has voluntarily shackled itself to American military strategy. This has meant the stationing of US bases and military cooperation in US wars (Vietnam, Middle East). Also important but less well known are access for aircraft and naval vessels and participation in US military exercises.
It is only common sense that nuclear weapons would be constantly ready on all available ships.

Nuclear weapons are constantly being deployed throughout the world. They are part of the strategy of 'limited nuclear war', or 'theatre war' which is theoretically capable of being used in a battlefield rather than worldwide. Their installation has meant the end of the myth of 'deterrence' (when weapons were built for show rather than for use) and leads to the real possibility of a first-strike attack.

RADIATION FOR PORT PHILIP BAY?

There are no contingency plans to deal with an accident in an Australian port. No emergency services would be able to deal effectively with the dangers posed by high-level radiation in Port Philip Bay.

The Australian Atomic Energy Commission now monitors radiation levels during visits and is supposed to coordinate with emergency authorities in each State. But port officials in NSW, which still refuses vessels have stated that 'the State Emergency Services would not be ready to deal with the immediate release of radioactive materials'.

All the time these ships are in port the Energy Commission cannot check safety procedures on board assisted vessels for reasons of military security.

Evil Sir Philip Baxter, the former head of the Australian Atomic Energy Commission, and a leading figure in the pro-nuclear lobby, has warned that he personally would be unhappy about the idea of nuclear powered ships of any kind coming into ports for example into Sydney... I think with the advent of nuclear ships it is going to be necessary to build nuclear ports where the ships can come in, be properly screened and go out again, and not be right in the centre of a dense population of several millions.

In response to the Ranger Inquiry. 21/10/75

Tactical weapons are currently being deployed throughout the world. These weapons are part of the strategy of 'limited nuclear war', or 'theatre war' which is theoretically capable of being used in a battlefield rather than globally. Their introduction has meant the end of the myth of 'deterrence' (when weapons were built for show rather than for use) and leads to the real possibility of a first-strike attack.

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DATE AND VESSEL

May 27 1988 US Nuclear Powered Submarine (Scorpion)

1984 Soviet Ballistic Submarine G.Class

Nov. 4, 1979 US Destroyer Goldsborough (Visited Melbourne 1983)

Nov. 75 US Guided Missile Cruiser BELKNAP

1975, Gazan, Apra Harbour.


July 19, 1983 US Nuclear Destroyer TEXAS

DESCRIPTION AND SOURCE

Lost at sea. Cause undetermined but possibly associated with a collision two months earlier.

(Navy Mag July 1988)

Submarine sank while cruising the Pacific (720 miles NW of Hawaii) after a series of explosions on board. The sub carried nuclear-armed torpedoes.

(New York Times 19/3/76)

Boiler explosion 8 miles NW of Taiwan killed 4 injured. The destroyer was armed with nuclear ASROC and TARTAR missiles.

(San Francisco Chronicle 11/3/70)

After a crash with the aircraft carrier JF KENNEDY during manoeuvres in the Mediterranean, the Belknap suffered extensive damage. Both the Belknap and the JF KENNEDY contain nuclear weapons.

(Newspaper 8/12/75)

A disabled submarine discharged highly radioactive cooling water into the harbour. Radiation levels at two nearby public beaches reached over 50 times the government limit.

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A HISTORY OF OPPOSITION

Ironically enough, nuclear powered warships were first banned from Australia by Liberal PM Billy MacMahon in the late 1969s. The reason for the ban was that port facilities, located near population centres, could not cope with a nuclear accident. The ban was maintained until 1975 when it was lifted by the Fraser government.

However this ban had no effect on nuclear-armed conventionally powered vessels bringing warheads into port because both the ALP and the Liberals made it clear that "nuclear armed ships have come to Australia for many years. Successive governments have accepted that naval ships these days are quite likely to be nuclear-armed." (E.G. Whitlam: Hansard 4/6/76)

Unions, anti-war groups, and environmentalists have been in the forefront of protest against nuclear warships as part of a nuclear-free campaign spanning the Pacific. Vanuatu, like the tiny Mediterranean nation of Malta, has declared itself nuclear-free. Belau, an island trust territory occupied by the US during World War II has voted three times for a Nuclear-Free constitution which the US continues to reject. Protests in New Zealand, whites and Macoris, have time and time again greeted warships with flotillas and demonstrations until the US has all but given up trying to bring their unwanted 'goodwill'.

Nuclear powered warships were first banned from Australia by Liberal PM Billy MacMahon

In June 1982 Victoria's new Labor government declared the State nuclear-free and refused to accept the visits of nuclear-armed or nuclear powered warships. Fraser responded by inviting the USS Goldsborough to Melbourne and passing legislation giving power to the Federal government over the transit of warships. The act set out a compulsory $1000 fine or 6 months jail for any offences under the Act in a clear attempt to stop protest. The ALP voted against this Act at the time but have yet to repeal it.

The Victorian Government's action forced the Federal ALP to take a stand on the issue. Hayden initially made noises which were vaguely sympathetic but fell in line with Fraser after being rapped over the knuckles at the ANZUS meeting of that year.

Since that time the ALP in government has accepted and even welcomed nuclear warships. Following protests in Perth and Fremantle, the W.A. State ALP moved to refuse warships. The Federal Government did not accept this. When Waterside unions brought Brisbane's port to a standstill over the visit of the USS Texas, Hayden welcomed the vessel at an on-board reception. At the Forum of Pacific Nations the Federal Government argued for a nuclear-free South-West Pacific which would allow nuclear armed and powered vessels to continue using this area. This ridiculous position came under harsh criticism from more independent Pacific nations.

A NUCLEAR-FREE AND INDEPENDENT PACIFIC

The visits of warships to Australian ports are just one local aspect of the increasing militarisation of the Pacific. Both the USSR and the US have been stepping up their activities in the area. America, used to having a free rein in the Pacific, has lately used the Soviets using their one-time base at Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam and regard this as expansionism. The Russians at the same time see the superiority of the US Navy in the Pacific and accuse the US of expansionism claiming merely to be trying to maintain a presence against overwhelming odds.

The people of the Pacific have suffered from the presence of nuclear weapons for many years. Weapons tests began on the Marshall Islands in 1946 and have since taken place in Australia, elsewhere in Micronesia, and in French Polynesia, as well as on mainland China. Over 210 nuclear bombs have been exploded in the South Pacific and the French still test at Mururoa despite protest by regional nations.

The build-up of weapons and warships are linked. People who live in the region are not able to determine how their own countries should be run. It is obviously of great importance to the superpowers that they be able to maintain their bases throughout the Pacific, so they will be actively opposing any moves towards independence or non-alignment by indigenous people.

Opposition to warships is part of the movement for a nuclear-free and independent Pacific and points out Australia's role in the escalation of the arms race. Actions overseas and in Australia have been successful in drawing public attention to the nuclear warships issue but much more can be done in the future.

A group called 'Project Iceberg' has been set up to publicise the impact of warships both locally and internationally, and to organise direct protest against the visits of nuclear armed and powered warships to Australian ports.

This leaflet is the first of a series that we will produce concentrating on warships.

The name 'Iceberg' comes from a group that was established in 1983 in Perth to oppose the visits of warships, it refers to the fact that warships are just the 'tip of the iceberg'.

Project Iceberg meets regularly in Melbourne and can provide speakers for groups or further information. Support is also welcomed.

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