

## Dissent, Democracy and a Discourse of Peace

**Text and photo: Michael Otterman**

On 23 July, CPACS Director Jake Lynch urged the packed house at the Old Geology Lecture Theatre to unplug from the matrix of “the political-media hubbub, the babble in the bubble, the yada-yada-yada of daily public discourse”.

Delivering the Sydney Peace Foundation 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Lecture, Lynch said the matrix is fueled in part by the military-industrial complex, the symbiotic relationship between political interests, the armed forces, and defense industry.

Lynch reminded the audience of former US President Eisenhower’s warning to the American people: “In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.”

Yet, the military-industrial complex has only grown since. Despite governments’ perception of the constant need for protection against threats, the world has less need for draconian laws or increased military spending, said Lynch.

A “security discourse” persists today. Lynch pointed to Britain’s justification of spending billions of pounds on nuclear weapons because “we don’t know what the world will be like in 20, 30, or 40 years time”. This discourse of fear, unchallenged and amplified by the political-media matrix, only serves to strengthen hardliners in other regimes. “Hawks in Tehran, Pyongyang and elsewhere suddenly gained another persuasive argument

— they are preparing for war; we must do too,” Lynch said.

There is an alternative, he insists: the peace discourse, “based on acknowledging that the world we encounter is partly of our own making, so we must each take our share of responsibility for it”. Many disagree. American neo-conservative Richard Perle, former senior Pentagon advisor, for one is convinced that “any attempt to discuss the roots of terrorism is an attempt to justify it — it simply needs to be fought and destroyed.”

Lynch said that it is crucial for political violence, broadly dubbed by the matrix as “terrorism”, to be understood. “We are told that political violence is attributable to the machinations of an ‘evil ideology’; any attempt to enquire into the conditions, material or historical, in which that ideology can appeal to people is shouted down.”

The roots of political violence are easily discernible. For Lynch, they include the Sykes-Picot treaty that denied Arabs self-rule, the events of 1948 which drove 700,000 Palestinians from their homeland, the 1953 CIA-sponsored coup that brought the Shah to power in Iran, and the sanctions and war that have

claimed up to two millions lives in Iraq. “Those who live with the consequences of war know they cannot afford to disconnect cause from effect,” Lynch added.

“The lesson? Sometime, somewhere, fighting and destroying have to stop; let it be here and let it be soon.”

Michael Otterman is a visiting scholar at the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies and the author of *American Torture: From the Cold War to Abu Ghraib and Beyond*. His website is [www.americantorture.com](http://www.americantorture.com).

## Short Takes

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Lynch taking a question from the floor.