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The decision to go to war is one of the most serious choices any government will face. The cost to citizens can be their lives. The cost to the nation is always enormous, often unpredictable.

Currently, the decision to send troops into overseas conflict is made behind closed doors, often by the prime minister alone, in secret.

The decision to engage in war is one of far too many decisions made without proper deliberation. For example, Prime Minister Howard and colleagues Downer and Brandis colluded to direct ASIS to spy on Timor L'Este contrary to the interests of Australian Citizens and for the benefit of party campaigns.

Australia's decisions to engage in war have been taken poorly and without robust process.

The predecessors of these faulty processes predate the formation of the Commonwealth. "The Frontier Wars" is a term often used to describe the more than 100 years of violent conflicts between colonial settlers and the Indigenous peoples that occurred during the British settlement of Australia.

SBS recently published :

[https://www.sbs.com.au/language/english/en/podcast-episode/what-were-the-australian-wars-and-why-is-history-not-acknowledged/1fbjri42?dlb=\[2022/09/17\]%20del_newsweekend_bau&did=DM17782&cid=sbsnews:edm:acnewswe:relation:news:na:na](https://www.sbs.com.au/language/english/en/podcast-episode/what-were-the-australian-wars-and-why-is-history-not-acknowledged/1fbjri42?dlb=[2022/09/17]%20del_newsweekend_bau&did=DM17782&cid=sbsnews:edm:acnewswe:relation:news:na:na)

There is a 14min50sec SBS sound episode.

There are true statements about the violence inflicted by British and Aboriginal people.

There are many false statements about recent denial of the conflicts. I recall graphic accounts taught publicly in the mid 1950s at Port Arthur in Tasmania about the deliberate annihilation over about ten years to 1830s of Tasmanian Aboriginals in retaliation for indigenous attacks on colonists.

There are political statements in the SBS program that the British could not **declare war** because the Aborigines were and are citizens. Yes, that is true, but it is said in an attempt to disguise the fact that the conflicts could not **be a war** for exactly the same reason. The proponents announce that they very deliberately seek to relabel the conflicts as "Australian Wars" in order to increase the rights of aboriginal people. Their objective is based on a promotional falsehood.

The point of this story is that the decisions to engage in conflict have long been ill-conceived, with serious, unpredicted outcomes.

The "Frontier Wars" conflicts were very violent, very bloody, with outrageous abuses committed by both sides. They were widespread, they were prolonged, but they were not universal. Large elements of aboriginal people were cooperative with settlers, farmers, traders and colonial authorities (less so in Tasmania), including aboriginal farm workers, native police, aboriginal members of the armed forces. The conflicts were not wars, but their outcomes have been complex and are yet to reach fruition.

Like the wars engaged subsequently by Australia, the rationale has been poorly debated, and the outcomes have contained much we would not have accepted in advance.

Australia needs a system where robust debate and a parliamentary vote is held before deciding whether troops are sent into overseas conflict. Will parliamentary debate and vote always avoid flawed decisions to fight? No. Debates and votes are heavily flawed. But we have no better process to engage the issues.

We want legislation requiring parliamentary approval for entering conflict, so we have proper debate, scrutiny and critical appraisal of the decision. We want those who take these decisions held publicly to account for their errors.

Just as Messrs Howard, Downer and Brandis must be held to account for their monumental blunders in the ACT, in Timor L'Este and to the great damage of Australian Citizens.

Sincerely,

Glen Davis

(address provided)