

WHITE PAPER ON DEFENCE 2013

SUBMISSION NO. 1 FROM THE

AUSTRALIAN ANTI-BASES CAMPAIGN COALITION

The Defence White Paper is being written within the context of the Global Economic Crisis, the shift of economic weight to our region; and the US military 'pivot to Asia and the Indo-Pacific region.

The Labor Government has chosen to intensify Australia's military co-operation and alliance with the United States while simultaneously endeavouring to cultivate friendly ties with its regional neighbours. This approach is contradictory and has come at a large cost in terms of Australia's military spending and security.

Formulation of the 2013 DWP offers an opportunity to improve this strategic approach, paying particular attention to eliminating the risk of escalating tension and even war in the region and of undermining good relations with a major trading partner.

There is an urgent need for government and defence planners to start thinking in new, creative and positive ways about Australia's security. We need to rethink what we mean by security, develop different relationships with regional states, reassess the weapons systems required to satisfy our security interests, and increase aid to our regional neighbours.

"On one side lies coercion, but on the other lies inducement. Coercion is about raising costs and risks, inducement is about increasing benefits and rewards." (Robert Ayson, "Trying to Influence Giants", Security Challenges, Vol. 4, Number 2 (Winter 2008), p. 162). Much more thought and energy needs to go into inducements.

To reduce the danger of Australian involvement in aggressive and destabilising US military policies, and the exorbitant military spending this inevitably demands, the level of Australian military integration/interoperability with the US military must be drastically reduced, and recent decisions to station US Marines in Darwin, increase US ship and plane visits to Australia, hold more joint military exercises, and station drones in the Cocos Island must be reconsidered.

The new US strategic approach, which Australia is supporting, places China at the centre of US "security" concerns and prioritises expansion of US war making capacities in Asia and the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

The US strategy is to exaggerate the level of China's present military buildup, to encircle China through the acquisition of military bases in the Asian-Pacific region, to establish anti-Chinese alliances, and to deploy Theatre Missile Defense (TMD) systems near China.

Australia's intelligence community has stated that China's current limited military build-up is not a threat to Australia. Rather it is China's response to the huge US military expansion in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Australian Government is helping to create the very threat it is using to justify a massive military escalation. The 2013 DWP must reverse this situation.

It is time for Australia to have a government which recognises that military power is no longer regarded by most nations as the only or best basis for security. We cannot afford a continued paradigm which defines regional engagement and defence of national security as interoperability with the United States in potential high intensity conflicts.

The Gillard government is spending \$30 billion a year on the military, but there is no comparable significant investment in diplomacy, aid programs and other peaceful means to avoid the nightmare scenario of military confrontation between the US and China.

Seeking peace with justice and cutting military spending is a more effective and constructive way of making Australia more secure than investment in militarism and military alliances.

Defence doctrines, foreign affairs, and economic questions are closely inter-related policies for any government. Their fundamental purpose should be to ensure the sovereignty, security and economic and social well-being of a country and its people.

While defence of a state is necessary, the cost cannot be too high (economically, socially, democratically, environmentally, etc.) or there is little or nothing left worth defending. There is a point past which military strength becomes a source of insecurity.

Security is often interpreted to mean military security. However, human security also relies on addressing the causes of social disadvantage, political injustice and environmental degradation. The over-emphasis in casting the military as Australia's guarantee of "security" has not engendered a true culture of national security.

Security cannot be enforced by ever greater numbers of ever more sophisticated weapons. It is increasingly clear that real and enduring security comes with jobs, steady food supplies, homes, clean water, warmth, education and health care, democracy and human rights.

Resources committed to the military mean less money for developing strong social cohesion and stability within the nation through employment programs and meeting the health, education and housing needs of Australians and our neighbours.

A feature of military expenditure is its "opportunity costs", that is, the opportunities which are foregone for alternative consumption and investment. Military spending contributes to fiscal and debt crises, complicates stabilisation and adjustment, and negatively affects economic growth and development.

Military expenditure reduces public and private investment in civilian enterprises, diverts funds and personnel from civilian research and development, and increases the current account deficit. It tends to retard the rate of economic growth.

All these factors make it clear that, especially in the context of the Global Economic Crisis, Australia must reconfigure its strategic and defence policies to allow funding cuts.

If Australia's security is to be assured, the Australian Government must adopt a foreign policy commitment to friendly and mutually beneficial relations with all countries. This must be combined with an independent and non-aligned defence policy which should be efficient, affordable and serve both the defence needs of our country and the need for peace and stability in our region. Australia's national security rests on pursuing a genuinely defensive, non-offensive, non-provocative defence stance.

A rational reassessment of our security priorities would lead to a number of conclusions which would contribute to Australia's security.

These include such things as:

- using more defensive and less costly systems as opposed to the long-range, aggressive capabilities currently in use;
- restricting the level of military integration with the United States military and the level of US military forces and materiel in our territory.
- exercising much greater independence in military decisions, while allowing some military co-operation with a partner country if our decisions are based on Australia's territorial security and the wider common good.
- redirecting a proportion of the military budget to upgrading schools, reducing the cost of university education, supporting childcare, developing Medicare, assisting the needy in our community, maximising employment opportunities, solving the water crisis, and so on. It has been estimated that two weeks military spending, about \$700 million, spent on public hospitals each year would overcome their critical shortcomings
- developing a proper coastal protection system;
- committing Australia to possess enough military force to defend our territory but not to threaten the territory of other states;
- focussing on dual-use equipment (for example, aircraft which can be used for water bombing bushfires as well as for coastal surveillance and interception);
- investing time and effort in regional arms control through bodies such as ASEAN;
- working to develop transparency and confidence building in the region and to restrict a regional arms race;
- increasing the share of GDP allocated to overseas aid;
- contributing to the elimination of the foreign debt of developing nations;
- expanding trade and co-operation in the development of science and medicine, educational and cultural exchanges.

Providing that the 2013 Defence White Paper incorporates some new thinking on Australia's security, we can move toward more stable and balanced social and economic development within a more sustainable international economic and political order.

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