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Submission for the Defence White Paper

Key Questions for Defence in the 21st Century

The twentieth century was marked by two world wars, a Cold War, the threat of a nuclear war and an unrelenting arms race with world spending on armaments reaching enormous sums. There was great progress in science and technology that enables us now to create suffering and destruction on an unprecedented scale.

The world has become more and more militarised but can any country say it is any safer from attack or terrorism? Are we to repeat this continued military build-up and reliance on force into the next centuries?

Up to now defence of a country has meant an increase in weaponry numbers and an increase in capabilities with an increase in money spent on military pursuits; this has increased suspicion between countries and people.

The key question should be: We need new thinking and a new approach to defence in the 21st century. For Australia's region and strategic interests:

1. We should not increase the military weapons or military forces that we have as this is likely to provoke a similar response from our neighbours.
2. We should not introduce new weapon systems or technology to the region as this makes our neighbours suspicious and could lead to an arms race.
3. The patrol of Australia's coastal waters is a priority to deter smugglers and other illegal traffic, also measures should be taken to deal with pirates on high seas.

4. To have an independent foreign policy we should support international law and the United Nations and not individual countries.
5. Providing humanitarian assistance and responding to natural disasters is a priority.
6. Foreign military bases make our neighbours uneasy, these should be scaled down and brought under Australian control. There should be no element of the missile defence system in Australia.
7. There needs to be a Department for Peace and International Co-operation at government level to deal with threats to peace with negotiations the top priority. Diplomats and skilled negotiators should be ready to be sent to trouble spots and potential trouble spots so there is less reliance on military force.
8. Peace education needs to be taught at schools - i.e. the UN Charter, international law and treaties.

In this 21st century, we now face the added danger and chaos that global warming and climate change will bring, this will need a huge humanitarian response. Dwindling resources have become a serious issue and pollution and climate change threatens the security of countries and people, but military vehicles and military pursuits are by far the biggest polluter and user of scarce resources. We need to convert military industries to socially useful industries.

It is time to change priorities from military defence to civilian defence.

Pauline Mitchell

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