

## **Defence White Paper Submission – 18<sup>th</sup> September 2008**

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My submission for the Defence white paper focuses on three things – the way to structure our forces, the greatest threat to Australia and recruitment.

### **1 – A Nonviolent Peaceforce**

I wish first to acknowledge the courage and sacrifice of current and former members of the ADF. I also acknowledge the vast array of skills and knowledge that our military has that no other sector of our country has – skills in organisation, rapid response, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, supply logistics and advanced communication technologies. These skills are invaluable to Australia and need to be maintained.

But I wish to challenge the belief that military intervention and violence are the way to achieve peace and stability for our nation, region and world. The defence paper itself states that “we have no indication that any state has the intent to attack Australia or to engage in inter-state conflict in Australia’s region” and that there has been no evidence of actors in our region attempting to acquire strategic weapons [Pg 28].

With no reasonable threat of invasion by near or far neighbours, I propose that the ADF take measures to decrease its military capability to non-offensive defence capabilities only. In particular Australia should have no involvement in ‘Coalition Operations in High-Intensity Wars’ and participation in the US Missile Defence System (including theatre missile defence) – as both of these are seen as highly aggressive actions by our neighbours and contribute to instability and insecurity in our region and world. Australia should only be involved in the upholding of international

law when it is under the auspices of the UN, and never in concert with an ally who flaunts the international process (i.e. the US with the war in Iraq). Our military's primary role must be structured so that it can respond more effectively to the tasks in its portfolio (in my order of priority): the provision of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, support of the rule of international law, national security responses and deterring attacks on Australia.

To better meet these tasks our military needs to take proactive actions to reduce its military offensive capability by half and commit this to creating an Australian Nonviolent Peaceforce. Our defence needs to be limited non-offensive defence capabilities only.

I have served as a member of a nonviolent peace force on the frontline in the West Bank in Palestine and I can affirm that nonviolence is much more effective at creating peace than military offensives are. Even against a vastly more armed opponent.

Violence only begets more violence.

(For clarity on how to structure a nonviolent peaceforce see the detailed feasibility study at [www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org](http://www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org) )

The benefits of a nonviolent army over a conventional army are many.

I wish to highlight two glaring differences.

Firstly, as a nonviolent army refuses to kill its enemies the cost of waging a war in terms of life will always be at least 50% of conventional warfare. And if waged strategically and intelligently it will be much less – with negotiated peace being the outcome with minimal life lost.

Secondly the cost of waging a nonviolent struggle would be astronomically less than the current \$22 billion (3% of our GDP) dedicated to our defence –

much of which could be funnelled into much needed areas of education, health care and housing affordability.

A nonviolent peaceforce will have as its primary role the focus on bringing peace and security to our neighbours and possible future enemies.

True security will not come from a larger military capability, but rather from a shared understanding of our neighbours needs.

## **2 – Response to climate change**

I submit that the greatest threat to Australia has nothing to do with terrorism or invasion by its neighbours. I echo Peter Cosgrove, former ADF chief, who at the 2020 summit said that the greatest threat to Australia's security is climate change.

If we continue with business-as-usual, amassing more and more military hardware and more and more personnel and not put in proactive steps within the military to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and without by reconfiguring the ADF to be part of a world climate change response force, we can look forward to many wars over basic resources as they become scarcer and scarcer. We've already had wars over oil. Wars over water and food (already in evidence as crop failures hit those least able to cope with soaring prices) are looming fast. There will be millions of environmental refugees – we can either build a fortress and try to keep them out of our territory, or we can get in early (NOW) and ameliorate the impacts of more and more severe climate change events.

Our defence forces must be changed from an offensive capability to one that can work in concert with our neighbours so that resource wars can be prevented long before they develop.

I submit that a further ninth task be added to the other eight that are mentioned in the discussion paper – and that is ‘Combating climate change’. This needs to be our highest priority. At this point in our planet’s history we do not need more military and more tension between nations, we need more cooperation and concerted action to combat climate change.

### **3 – Recruitment Issues**

I wish to offer some advice on recruitment and retention – and especially in the context of Gen Y.

Firstly recruitment will always be difficult when the product you are trying to promote is the wilful killing of other human beings. This coupled with the potential loss of own life makes Gen Y very reticent to participate in the ADF.

But secondly, and more importantly as the ADF is capable of influencing it, is this:

As globalisation and increased media have raised international awareness amongst Gen Y they are painfully aware of the consequence of war on our international neighbours and Australia’s role as a major aggressor in a number of those conflicts.

Personal and financial incentives (cheaper housing loans, social security benefits and job security) are not enough for Gen Y to overcome this obstacle. Gen Y no longer believes that the stated goal of our military is to defend Australia. They are too realistic – they understand that our involvement in the conflicts around the globe (in particular Iraq and Afghanistan and Israel) have very little to do with security or peace keeping – and more to do with the control of power and control of resources. Gen Y no longer believes that the alliance with the US contributes to Australia’s

security. They understand that it has more to do with maintaining Australia's place of privilege in the world than defending its borders and upholding the rule of international law.

Younger generations have a keen concern for social justice, poverty eradication, development of poorer nations, climate change, human rights protection and equality for all.

If the ADF wishes to reverse the trends in recruitment and retention, then it must feed back into Australia's political system that our alliances and our involvement in coalition high-intensity conflicts have decreased our security and have meant that we have contributed to the abuse of human rights around the world.

Gen Y above all else are a generation of idealists – they find themselves lost amongst the options that are available to them and are desperate for an option that will give them meaning in life and a concrete way of making a difference in this world. Reconfigure the ADF so its primary role is climate change response and nonviolence is its major weapon and younger Australians will once again be proud to serve in their forces.

Lest we forget those that have sacrificed their lives for our freedom let us contribute to war no more.