

Marrickville Peace Group  
PO Box 647  
Marrickville, NSW, 2204.

### **Submission to the Defence White Paper.**

#### **Summary of Main Points:-**

1. The invasion of Iraq was a dreadful mistake, very costly to Australia in terms of international prestige lost and potential enemies gained.
2. This reveals failure of defence policy at a very fundamental level.
3. Our present policy places too much emphasis of the US alliance and the use of high-tech military hardware.
4. In terms of our true defence, this is counter-productive.
5. Increasing global instability is forecast. The intuitive response to this instability - of increasing military expenditure - is inappropriate.
6. Persistence in the old (failed) policy, for example by allowing more US military facilities on Australian territory, will not protect us.
7. Persistence in the old policy may damage our current, highly valued friendship with the US.
8. We advocate a lowering of Australia's disproportionately high, current military profile.
9. We urge the diversion of defence resources into life-affirming activities such as health, education, humanitarian aid and coping with climate change.
10. We advocate the expenditure of defence resources on studying the skills of making peace, rather than the skills of warfare. We propose the establishment of a Peace Academy, under the auspices of the Department of Defence.

#### **Submission:-**

From reading the Discussion Paper (DP), we note that our country is not under threat at present and that the policy of the previous White Paper was to 'keep the country safe from possible threats'<sup>i</sup>. We applaud this objective, whilst maintaining that it is best achieved by means that are not exclusively military. A similar view has recently been expressed by US Defense Secretary, Robert Gates.

The DP points out that the possible causes of conflict have broadened considerably. Scarcity of resources is mentioned as one<sup>ii</sup>. We agree, and go further and say that the use of military force to obtain or control resources is already with us. We put a date on when this process became overt – 20:03:2003, the day that Iraq was invaded. We are amongst the many convinced that the true reason for the invasion was a desire for US control over oil resources.

Our group came into existence before the invasion of Iraq. There are hundreds of thousands of Australians, who took part in the rallies before the invasion, who see that Australia's involvement displayed deep flaws in defence policy. This consultation is the opportunity to address them.

In the invasion of Iraq, Australian forces were not deployed in our nation's defence, by any stretch of the imagination. We were led into it by a trust in the US that we can now clearly see to have been very badly mistaken.

In the invasion, we joined in an unjustified attack on a nation with which we had no quarrel. This did our country great harm. We lost international prestige<sup>ii</sup>. All we gained were potential enemies. We now doubtless have a reputation as one of the world's aggressor nations – a reputation we could well do without. The invasion did nothing to 'keep the country safe from possible threats', precisely the contrary. This indicates a serious policy failure.

We are disappointed to see that the DP appears to take it for granted that Australia will continue to contribute to 'US-led coalition operations'. It even hints at a need for 'interoperability' adaptations and 'capability enhancements'<sup>iv</sup>. This opens the possibility that the coming White Paper might argue that the ADF needs new, high-tech equipment so *that* it can again involve itself in exercises like the US-led invasion of Iraq.

If we persist in this, and engage in campaigns such as the one in Iraq and the present one in Afghanistan, we do the opposite to truly defending Australia.

In our view, the problem lies with too much dependence upon the US in matters military, an excessive willingness to subscribe to a US-style approach and an unwillingness to critically appraise US leadership.

Our dependence is demonstrated by the increasing presence of US military facilities on Australian territory. We question their necessity and ask 'Do these facilities protect us from threat, or do they actually increase threat by making us a potential target?' We sense that it is the latter.

So, following the failure of the Iraq adventure, we seriously question the wisdom of maintaining the present closeness of our military ties with the US and our unquestioning support of US foreign policy. We stress the fact that the US is a valuable friend of Australia. In our view, over-emphasis on the military component of the relationship will be counter-productive and damage the friendship.

We agree that the world is likely to become less stable as the impacts of climate change and resource shortages deepen. We appreciate that an intuitive response to this situation is to seek re-assurance in improved military capability.

However, we say that the sense of security provided by military hardware is illusory, and in fact increases the likelihood of conflict actually taking place. We argue that if Australia increases military expenditure it will actually worsen the global situation and heighten the very instability we all fear. A country seen to be devoting an enlarged portion of its wealth to matters military will be perceived as a potential enemy. To illustrate the point, one of the reasons the US has so many enemies lies in the fact that it maintains such an extensive military machine and relies on military prowess to gain influence. Even their Defence Secretary has recently spoken of too much emphasis on the military in US foreign policy<sup>v</sup>.

Instead of unquestioningly siding with the US's geo-political interests, we should re-assess the extent to which the alliance actually protects our safety in an unstable world. Hope for non-violent resolution of the instabilities we face lies in foreign policies that are independent; that keep us on negotiating terms with all countries and on fighting terms with none. Rather than arming ourselves against countries that appear to pose a terrorist threat – we should independently foster good relations with them through the provision of developmental assistance. Such policy should be an integral aspect of our true defence and protection.

Under this approach it would be possible to divert resources presently devoted to acquiring and maintaining armaments (the means for destroying life) into life-affirming activities such as education, health, humanitarian aid and coping with climate change and resource depletion.

We advocate a new and counter-intuitive approach. We advocate keeping Australia safe by developing our ability to resolve conflict through negotiation, NOT through military capability. We advocate increased training in the skills of peace-making, NOT the skills of warfare. We say that the art of making peace can be studied and learned to no less a degree than the art of making war, and that such study has a legitimate role to play in the defence of our nation. Indeed, we advocate the establishment of a 'Peace Academy' – under the auspices of the Department of Defence.

Australia's military posture in the world is presently out of proportion to our actual global influence and significance. The true defence of our nation lies in lowering our military profile and raising our capacity to promote peace positively.

Marrickville Peace Group. September 2008.

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<sup>i</sup> Discussion Paper, page 1.

<sup>ii</sup> Discussion Paper, page 20.

<sup>iii</sup> See, for example, Sydney Morning Herald, 06 September 2008, page 31.

<sup>iv</sup> Discussion Paper, page 32.

<sup>v</sup> Reported in the Washington Post 16 July 2008, page 6.