

# Medical Association for Prevention of War (Australia)



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## SUBMISSION TO DEFENCE WHITE PAPER, 1 OCTOBER 2008

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The Medical Association for Prevention of War (Australia) (MAPW) appreciates this opportunity to comment on the defence policy discussion paper “Key Questions for Defence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”, that has been prepared to assist in development of Australia’s new Defence White Paper.

A summary of MAPW’s position and recommendations will be presented, followed by brief discussion of some of the issues raised in the discussion paper, and some important issues that were omitted from it.

### Summary

The discussion paper, pleasingly, draws attention to the fact that our world is changing rapidly, and we must respond accordingly. Responses to threats that may have been appropriate in the past are not necessarily suitable responses now. One element in our changing response to threats, not mentioned in the discussion paper, must be the recognition that war itself has changed drastically over the last century. The effects of warfare are now suffered primarily by civilians rather than by military personnel. War is one of the greatest threats to human health. These factors alone should weigh extraordinarily heavily in any decision to involve Australia in any war.

The paper also recognises that our security cannot be addressed by armed force alone, but is very much dependant on other factors, including our foreign policy and respect for international law. The discussion paper mentions also climate change, energy and other resources (of which water is probably the most important), and weapons of mass destruction as all having an impact on notions of defence and how we can maintain the security of Australians. But the paper does not go nearly far enough in its examination of these issues. These threats, the very things that will most surely determine whether we survive as a robust nation, are given little more than lip service.

In addition, the clear intent that Australia’s armed forces should be capable of projecting power into the region means that our policy is not only a “defence” policy but also an “offence” policy, with all the destabilising implications that this carries for the region. Offensive military policies are likely to undermine our security.



## MAPW recommendations

MAPW recommends that:

- Australia ceases any participation of its forces, or use of land or naval facilities, that relate to nuclear war fighting or preparation.
  - Australia ceases support for the highly destabilising US missile defence system. Australian defence policy becomes truly “defensive” rather than “offensive”, not only in rhetoric but also in reality. Our weapons requirements and military budget should be reduced accordingly
  - The UN be upheld and strengthened, to fulfil its overarching goal of saving the world’s people from “the scourge of war”. Serious consideration should be given to support for the implementation of a UN Emergency Peace Service to prevent genocide and crimes against humanity.
  - International law be upheld, strengthened and promoted in Australia’s military actions.
  - Global poverty be recognised as a security threat, and a small fraction of Australia’s military budget be reallocated to increase our overseas development aid to 0.7% GDP.
  - All possible influence be used with the Indonesian government and military to urge a resolution of the conflict in West Papua, and respect for human rights. In particular, free access to West Papua for human rights monitors should be urged.
  - The Australian Government announce that no future arms fairs, including the Asia-Pacific Defence and Security Exhibition, will be held in Australia. Governments in the region should be urged similarly to refrain from the promotion of weapons acquisitions and militarisation.
  - Climate change be recognised as a far greater threat to Australians’ security than any military threat, and approached accordingly. It should be addressed as a whole-of-government issue, including by the Defence Department. Contributions to climate change by the ADF should be assessed, and reduced.
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## Introduction

The discussion paper addresses Australia’s armed forces’ ability to defend Australia from external attack. This is a legitimate exercise. However, it must be tailored to our circumstances. In the current context, in which we believe there are no nations actually intending to attack Australia, the paper is an anachronism, even if one accepts that situations and intentions can change. It is best suited to a different time and political climate. Of much greater value would be a paper that addresses the current context and threats which are pressing realities for us, threats which may well lead us into armed conflict in our region if they are not properly addressed.

While paying lip service to the severe limits of armed force in dealing with today’s threats, the paper ignores the significant contributions that could be made by the Defence Department in addressing our current situation. As a contribution to our overall security policy, it is therefore extremely limited.

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## **Detailed submission**

### **Nuclear weapons and Australian military activity**

There are currently 26,000 nuclear weapons in the world, 96% of them being in the US and Russia (with none, it should be noted, in Iran). Repeatedly, authorities have warned of three things:

- While any nation has nuclear weapons, other nations will want them;
- Unless nuclear weapons are abolished, they will be used again;
- Any such use would be catastrophic.

Calls for nuclear weapons abolition are coming from increasingly unexpected quarters, including former senior US administration officials George Schultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn, who have twice written in the Wall Street Journal of the need to not only reduce reliance on these weapons but to move to zero nuclear weapons.

It is extremely pleasing to see the announcement of Prime Minister Rudd's International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament. But we must realise that this is not just a matter for an international commission, encouraging though that is. The fact that our close ally the US has approximately 10,000 nuclear weapons, and continues to rely heavily on them and to threaten to use them —, while preaching abstinence to others — should be a matter of grave concern to our own defence forces. And yet this issue received zero attention in the discussion paper.

The following questions are important. What representations has our Defence Department made to our allies about their stated readiness to use nuclear weapons? What discussions are there about the Geneva Conventions and the fact that nuclear weapons make a mockery of them? What response is there to US threats to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states? What calls has the ADF made to the US and Russia to take their thousands of nuclear weapons off high-alert? How far does the issue of "interoperability" extend in relation to nuclear weapons, remembering that this issue very strongly and adversely influenced Australia's performance at the recent conferences to ban cluster munitions? What is the Defence Department view of the use of Australian soil at Pine Gap for nuclear weapons-related purposes?

Under current arrangements there is a distinct possibility that Australian facilities could be implicated in US use of nuclear weapons in Asia or the Middle East, possibly without Australian knowledge or consent. This is profoundly unethical and is not consistent with Australia's role in promoting nuclear weapons abolition. Australia should explore ways to denuclearise its military alliances, and not provide facilities, equipment or personnel or otherwise assist or be complicit in any possible use of nuclear weapons. This would greatly strengthen our credibility in nuclear disarmament, strengthen consistency and integrity in government policy and apply probably the most effective possible political pressure on the US to begin to take seriously its NPT disarmament obligation. In addition it would reduce the incentive for other nuclear weapons states to target Australia.

### **Missile Defence**

The US missile defence system is ill-conceived and dangerous. Contrary to the glib assurances that it will make us safer, it is almost certain to lead to more missiles and a destabilising and false sense of invulnerability on the part of the USA. Missile defence and its ground stations are a major factor

in the growing tension between Russia and Western Europe, tensions that could easily extend to Australia as they did during the Cold War.

While Iran is said to be the reason that missile defence is needed, Iran does not have a single missile that can reach Europe, let alone the US. It is not surprising that both Russia and China believe that it is their missiles that are being targeted. The response is obvious – more missiles.

Missile defence is destabilising, almost certainly technically unfeasible and will fuel vertical nuclear weapons proliferation. Australia should withdraw from any role in it.

### **Military budget**

Australia's level of military spending appears to bear little relationship to the magnitude and nature of the threats Australia faces. Over the last decade our military budget has increased dramatically, despite the absence of any specific external military threats. There has been an emphasis on equipment that is more oriented to long-range power projection than to the defence of our shores. This has the potential to raise tensions in the region, and lead to greater militarisation of the region to the detriment of regional security. Australia's military budget should be reduced, and its focus returned sharply to the defence of our shores rather than projection into the region and beyond.

### **Upholding of the United Nations**

The security of Australians is best served by the upholding of the UN and its ideals, in our military policy, our funding allocations, and in the broader diplomatic work in which Australia engages. For example, had the nature and direction of Australia's approach to terrorism over the past seven years been guided by adherence to the authority of the UN rather than to its most powerful member state, Australians would now be more secure from the threat of terrorism than we in fact are.

While Australian contributions to UN peacekeeping operations have been significant and valuable, there is much more that can be done to implement the essential peacekeeping roles of the UN and the "responsibility to protect" that is receiving increasing and very welcome attention. Calls for a UN Emergency Peace Service to prevent genocide and crimes against humanity, and a possible role for Australia in such a service, should be given serious attention and all possible support.

### **International law**

A further issue given grossly insufficient attention in the discussion paper is that of respect for international law. The paper refers (page 20) to "extremist ideologies, terrorist groups and others that refuse to be bound by . . . the rule of law." In the wake of Australia's participation in an invasion of another country five years ago, an invasion that was condemned by a large proportion of the world's people, grossly destabilised the Middle East even more than previously, did untold damage to the rule of law and absolutely violated fundamental principles of international conduct, this reference is astonishing.

The paper appears to imply that a multinational military operation is automatically a legitimate and legal one. This is of course not the case, and the paper's failure to draw the distinction is unfortunate.

Respect for international law is fundamental to our security. It must be upheld, not violated.

## **Poverty and insecurity**

Poverty and injustice create breeding grounds for hatred and its most extreme manifestation, terrorism. James Wolfensohn, former President of the World Bank, said in 2004:

*“There are 5 billion people in the developing world, 3 billion earning under \$US2 per day, and 1.2 billion earning under \$1 per day. If you can’t give them hope, these people become the basis on which terrorists or renegades or advocacy groups can flourish. If you cannot deal with the problem of hope or economic security, there is no way that with military expenditure you can have peace.”*

Global security would be enhanced by the provision of adequate health care, clean water, food, sanitation, shelter and basic education for all people. The Millennium Development Goals, which would provide these basic needs for all people, are readily achievable for a small fraction of the cost of global military expenditures. The World Bank estimates that a mere \$US 40 – 60 billion globally are needed.

Australia’s current development aid falls far short of the UN standard of 0.7% GDP. We could play a much stronger role in promoting global security by increasing our overseas aid to 0.7% GDP. A very small reallocation of some of our military budget would suffice to achieve this goal.

## **Regional security**

The discussion paper states, “Today, we have no indication that any state has the intent to attack Australia or to engage in inter-state conflict in Australia’s region. The ability to defend Australian territory however remains the foundation of our security policy.” The operative words here are, or should be, “defend Australian territory”.

While few would argue against policies to protect Australia from external attack, there is a strong and valid argument that acquiring weapons in case our neighbours become aggressive in future can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Rather than protecting us from future acts of aggression, renewed weapons purchases are more likely to provoke such aggression. In other words, neighbours can become alarmed by Australia’s weapons acquisitions and uncertain of our motives, especially when long-range weapons are included. An arms race may then ensue.

The security of Australians would in fact be better served by a *reduction* of our military spending, and policies that genuinely limit our military activity to defence rather than offence (and weapons to match the policies).

## **West Papua**

A particular regional issue of concern to Australia is the plight of the people of West Papua, who continue to suffer repression and human rights abuses at the hands of the Indonesian military. While MAPW is encouraged by reforms in Indonesia governance, and the nation’s moves towards democracy, the Indonesian military appears more resistant to change. MAPW notes this in the context of the Lombok Treaty for security cooperation between Australia and Indonesia, and defence cooperation generally between the two nations.

Past human rights abuses by the Indonesian military in all areas of the archipelago are well documented, but these abuses appear to be ongoing, particularly in West Papua. In January 2007, reports from church leaders, human rights defenders and the Indonesian media highlighted a military operation in the Puncak Jaya region of West Papua, which caused up to 5,000 people to flee

to the bush for their safety (*Jakarta Post*, 30 January 2007). Many of those who fled also faced starvation as they were afraid to return and work in their food gardens.

The US State Department's 2005 Human Rights report on Indonesia stated:

*“Security forces continued to commit unlawful killings of rebels, suspected rebels, and civilians in areas of separatist activity, where most politically motivated extrajudicial killings also occurred. There was evidence that the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) considered anyone killed by its forces in conflict areas to be an armed rebel. The government largely failed to hold soldiers and police accountable for such killings and other serious human rights abuses in Aceh and Papua.”*

More broadly, MAPW notes the serious costs to life and health that have been suffered by the people of West Papua because of the protracted conflict arising from incorporation into Indonesia. The most conservative estimates suggest 100,000 deaths among indigenous West Papuans, without considering deaths among military personnel.

It is imperative that this long-running conflict be resolved. The immediate costs are unacceptable for the West Papuan people, and the conflict has the potential to erupt in a similar fashion to the war in East Timor. MAPW urges Australia to use all possible influence to urge a just resolution to this conflict, and respect for human rights on the part of the Indonesian military. In particular, the latter goal would be enhanced by a commitment from the Indonesian Government to allow human rights monitors free access to West Papua.

### **Arming the region**

MAPW and many Australians strongly opposed the Asia-Pacific Defence and Security Exhibition (APDSE), an arms trade fair which was due to open in Adelaide on Remembrance Day, 11 November 2008.

The event was designed to capitalise on tensions in our region, and to arm the protagonists. If our aim were to devise an event specifically to *undermine* the security of Australians we could not do better. Indeed, the discussion paper (page 21) refers to the fact that “the increasing armament of nations, including in our own region . . . [means] that crises can emerge much faster and more unpredictably”.

Unless we are turning logic on its head, it follows that we should reduce, rather than increase, armaments in our region, including in Australia. In addition we should put genuine effort into regional and global arms control agreements, rather than selling as much weaponry as we can.

In this context, it is very pleasing to note the constructive role played by the Australian Government at the recent Biennial Meeting of States in New York to reduce the threat posed globally by small arms and light weapons. Such a role in reducing rather than increasing weapons transfers and sales will increase security for all people. MAPW encourages a greatly expanded role for negotiations on reducing both small and large weapons systems

MAPW notes the apparent low-key role taken by the Commonwealth Government in relation to APDSE, although regretting the very supportive statement offered by Defence Minister. Such promotion of events that help to arm possible future adversaries is contrary to our security interests.

MAPW strongly advocates that no future APDSE or other arms fairs be held in our region, and that Australia actively discourages them among regional governments.

In relation to the problem of arming our region, MAPW wishes to express particular concern at the choice of chairperson for the Defence Review community consultation meetings. While this concern does not reflect any adverse opinion on the personal qualities of former senator Stephen Loosley, MAPW regards it as highly inappropriate to appoint a board member from a leading arms manufacturing corporation to this position. We further note the desirability, for the community consultation, of having panel members with particular expertise in conflict resolution.

### **Common security, environmental threats and climate change**

The discussion paper fails to address the fact that the security of Australians cannot be separated from the security of other people.

This is increasingly so as environmental disasters and resource depletion drive many people from their homes and increase the risk of armed conflict. Armed conflict in turn causes major refugee crises. As just one of many examples of this, unless further climate change and rising sea levels are prevented, some Pacific Island nations, as well as large low-lying areas in Asia, are at risk of literally disappearing, and there will be large-scale movements of refugees and tensions within the areas to which they move.

How do we respond to these and other environmental threats? Do we take the drastic steps needed now to help mitigate the effects of climate change, or do we wait until these scenarios eventuate and then increase our defence budget further to control the hordes of refugees? Such questions require answers.

Obviously these overarching threats to our survival are not the sole responsibility of the Department of Defence. They do however have significant implications for our defence policies, and warrant more attention than a brief mention in passing.

Military activity is increasingly recognised as a major contributor to carbon emissions. Military vehicles use extremely large quantities of fossil fuels, whether they are engaged in warfare or training exercises. It is estimated that the Pentagon is the biggest fossil fuel consumer in the US. It is imperative that we examine this problem with a degree of urgency, given the disastrous impacts that climate change is already having, including on Australians. If we fail to do so, we risk augmenting an ever-worsening cycle of environmental disasters and armed conflicts, each reinforcing the other.

MAPW recommends a detailed examination of the climatic and other environmental impacts of ADF activities. This would include fossil fuel usage, carbon emissions and other related matters.