



Peace Movement Aotearoa

PO Box 9314, Wellington 6141. Tel (04) 382 8129, fax (04) 382 8173
email pma@xtra.co.nz website <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma>

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Defence Review 2009
Ministry of Defence
Email review09@defence.govt.nz

Submission to Defence Review 2009

Introduction

Peace Movement Aotearoa is the national networking peace organisation, established in 1982 as an incorporated society. Our purpose is networking and providing information and resources on peace, social justice and human rights issues. We have a commitment to peaceful resolution of conflict, at all levels from the personal through to international relations.

Due to staff sick leave over the past month, this submission does not include responses to the ten questions on the official form, rather, we make some brief comments below.

We would like to present our views at a public meeting. Our contact person is E. Hughes, email address as above.

Submission

The first question on the public consultation Review form - what should the role of the Defence Force be in responding to threats to New Zealand's security? - has an underlying assumption which essentially predetermines the outcome of the Review.

If this was a genuine review, then the starting point would be to assess what the threats to New Zealand's security (in the widest sense of the word) are, and then to examine whether or not a Defence Force can provide a solution to any of them.

While there are ten questions on the public submissions form, the obvious first and fundamental question is not asked - that is, do we actually need a Defence Force?

There are many good reasons why this question should be considered in the Review, and some are outlined below.

Firstly, there is the absence of any military threat for which a 'defence' force might be needed. The current Defence Policy Framework states: "New Zealand is not directly threatened by any other country and is not likely to be involved in widespread armed conflict." The Defence Review public consultation document states: "the country is not currently threatened by a direct military attack. More likely threats relate to New Zealand's maritime environment, where illegal fishing or resource extraction might occur."

In a speech earlier this year, Chief of Navy Rear Admiral David Ledson answered the question "What Is The Most Significant Maritime Security Threat Facing Your Nation And How Do Your Sea Services Address This Challenge?" thus:

"This appears on the surface to be such a simple question - and one for which you would expect a Chief of Navy to have the answer on the tip of his tongue at every moment. However, I have found it a challenge to get my head around providing a useful answer. I have, therefore, resorted to answering it from two perspectives - one looking at the near horizon of New Zealand's EEZ - and the other looking at the distant horizon beyond.

In the near waters, the most significant security threat relates to the ocean itself. Of course, its resources are important in themselves, but key to the management and sustainability of "the bounty of the ocean" is comprehensive knowledge of the oceanic environment - and for vast and far-reaching corners of our EEZ there are knowledge gaps. The task of closing the gaps is perceived by many to be solely a scientific activity. There is, though, a clear security benefit that can be extracted out of the science."¹

Whether or not the Rear Admiral is referring to real human security or security in its narrow military sense, nevertheless filling the gaps in knowledge of the ocean environment is obviously something that does not require a navy, nor any other armed forces, and this point is reinforced in the Rear Admiral's further comments:

"Looking further afield, the most significant threat is actually the lack of a tangible - to many of our sailors and the majority of our citizens - significant threat. Without a threat that has definition and "realness," there are significant challenges in developing and maintaining credible - but expensive - military capabilities, equipment, and personnel. "²

This leads directly to our second point, the financial cost of maintaining military capabilities. The budget for the Defence Force in the current financial year is \$3,207,435,000 - on average, military expenditure of more than \$8.7 million every day.

With the economic recession, with job losses and cuts in government funding for a wide range of socially useful activities such as adult education and training, assistance for children with special needs, ACC and more, there is a clear need for considered discussion about whether or not we really want that level of military expenditure.

All of the activities carried out by the Defence Force, with the exception of warfare, can be done by civilian agencies - fisheries protection, search and rescue, disaster relief and so on - and at far lower cost as civilian agencies do not require expensive military hardware and weapons systems.

Furthermore, the Defence Policy Framework includes at point 5:

"The Government believes that New Zealand can best contribute to regional stability and global peace by promoting comprehensive security through a range of initiatives including diplomacy, the pursuit of arms control and disarmament, addressing global environmental concerns, providing development assistance, and building trade and cultural links. New Zealand will continue to meet its UN Charter commitments to the maintenance of international peace and security."

While we appreciate the Framework was developed by the previous government, nevertheless, the current government has not as yet indicated any radical departure from these goals - and, again, these are all things which do not require military force, and indeed are better achieved without it.

Which brings us to the final point, if the Defence Force is not required to defend the country, it is expensive to maintain, and its only unique purpose is to engage in warfare - do we actually need it? It is not difficult to imagine that there may be more useful things than military capabilities that New Zealand could contribute to the world, both within the Pacific region and beyond.

This Review could have been an excellent opportunity to have genuine consideration of what New Zealand's real security needs are, how they can best be met, and what we can most usefully contribute overseas. Unfortunately that seems unlikely to happen, given the Minister of Defence's comment about the Review in a speech last week: "Although the public consultation is not completed, it is apparent there is a broad consensus on New Zealand's fundamental security priorities."³

It is difficult to see how a broad consensus can have been reached when those priorities have not even been discussed, and given the questions on the public consultation form, are not likely to be in the course of this Review.

References

¹ 'Commanders respond', Proceedings Magazine, US Naval Institute, March 2009 Vol. 135/3/1, 273

² As at note above

³ Speech to the Australia New Zealand Leadership Forum, Wayne Mapp, 21 August, 2009