



Peace Movement Aotearoa

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Welfare or warfare? Military spending in Budget 2020

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Military spending in the 2020 'Rebuilding Together' Budget is a total of \$4,621,354,000¹, that is an average of more than \$88.8 million every week.

While this is a small decrease when compared with the record amount of military spending allocated in Budget 2019², it does not go far enough. This year's allocation shows that despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the government still has the same old thinking about 'security' - a focus on outdated narrow military security concepts rather than real security that meets the needs of all New Zealanders.

Just yesterday the Prime Minister said the government would be running a ruler over every line of expenditure "to ensure our expenditure provides value for money", and "now more than ever we need our schools and hospitals, our public houses and roads and railways. We need our police and our nurses, and we need our welfare safety net."³ It is difficult to comprehend how this level of military spending can be justified as value for money or as helping to meet the need for essential social services.

This year, perhaps more than ever before, it is painfully obvious that military spending does



nothing to address the major issues facing Aotearoa - whether the increasingly visibly flawed health system, the lack of affordable housing, the levels of poverty and social inequality, the inadequate preparations for climate change, and so on - instead, military spending diverts resources that could be put to far better use.

For decades successive governments have stated that there is no direct military threat to this country, and - to be frank - if there was, then the New Zealand armed forces are not of a sufficient size to deter any military aggression.

Rather than continuing to focus on outdated narrow military security concepts, we urgently need to transition from maintaining combat-ready armed forces to civilian agencies that meet the wider security needs of all New Zealanders and our Pacific neighbours. Given

New Zealand's comparatively limited resources, the desperate need for substantially increased social funding domestically, as well as the urgent need for climate justice in the Pacific and globally, it simply makes no sense to continue to spend billions on military equipment and activities.

Fisheries and resource protection, border control, and maritime search and rescue could be better done by a civilian coastguard with inshore and offshore capabilities, equipped with a range of vehicles, vessels and aircraft that are suitable for our coastline, Antarctica and the Pacific, which - along with equipping civilian agencies for land-based search and rescue, and for humanitarian assistance here and overseas - would be a much cheaper option as none of these would require expensive military hardware.⁴

If there is any lesson to be learnt from the current pandemic, surely it is that new thinking about how best to meet our real security needs is essential. Instead of relying on an ideology that focuses on outdated narrow military security concepts, New Zealand could - and should - lead the way. Instead of continuing down the path of spending \$20 billion plus (in addition to the annual military budget) over the next decade for increased combat capability, including new military aircraft and warships, this is an opportune time to choose a new and better way forward.

A transition from combat-ready armed forces to civilian agencies, along with increased funding for diplomacy, would ensure New Zealand could make a far more positive contribution to wellbeing and real security for all New Zealanders, and at the regional and global levels, than it can by continuing to maintain and re-arm small but costly armed forces.

Where you can get more information

- Share this update on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/notes/peace-movement-aotearoa/welfare-or-warfare-military-spending-in-budget-2020/2932383820142301>
- Further information is available on the Aotearoa New Zealand Campaign on Military Spending page, <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/gdams.htm>

References

¹ This is the total across the three Budget Votes where most military expenditure is itemised: Vote Defence, \$649,003,000; Vote Defence Force, \$3,971,169,000; and Vote Education, \$1,182,000. When compared with Budget 2019, the allocations in Vote Defence and Vote Defence Force decreased by \$437,027,000, and the allocation in Vote Education increased by \$95,000.

² 'NZ Wellbeing Budget: Shocking rise in military spending', Peace Movement Aotearoa, 30 May 2019 and 'Global military spending increases, New Zealand ranks in report', Peace Movement Aotearoa, 27 April 2020, <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/gdams.htm>

³ Prime Minister's Pre-Budget speech, 13 May 2020, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz>

⁴ For more information about the costs of maintaining combat-ready armed forces, and better ways forward, see 'Submission: Budget Policy Statement 2020', Peace Movement Aotearoa, 23 January 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/PeaceMovementAotearoa/posts/2691336330913719>