



# Peace Movement Aotearoa

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## Armed forces review: have your say, do we really need them?

A reminder that if you wish to make a submission to the review of the armed forces, Defence Review 2009, the deadline is Monday, 24 August. There are two sections below: 1) some brief comments on the Review; and 2) where you can get more information, which includes links to the Review documents.

### 1) Some brief comments on the Review

The Review is supposed to: "involve a fundamental assessment of New Zealand's security environment, as well as the roles and tasks the Defence Force is expected to fulfil and the capabilities it requires to achieve these. It will also seek to ensure New Zealand achieves maximum value for money from its defence spending. The first such Review in over a decade, it will develop a blueprint for preparing New Zealand and its Defence Force for the challenges they face now and in the future." <sup>1</sup>

While there are ten questions on the public submissions form, the obvious first and fundamental question is curiously and conspicuously not asked - that is, why do we need armed forces?

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 'defence' forces 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." <sup>2</sup>

In a speech earlier this year, navy chief 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 coloring 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." <sup>3</sup>

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. " <sup>4</sup>

This leads directly to the second point - the financial cost of maintaining military capabilities. The budget for the armed forces in the current financial year is more than three billion dollars - \$3,207,435,000 to be precise. On average, this amounts to military expenditure of more than \$8.7 million every day.

With all the talk of 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, do we really want to be spending more than \$8.7 million (on average) every day on armed forces?

All of the activities carried out by the armed forces, 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 has 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. Underpinning this approach is the Government's strong commitment to maintaining New Zealand's nuclear free status and promoting a nuclear free South Pacific." <sup>5</sup>

Again, all things which do not require military force, and indeed are better achieved without it.

Which brings us to the third point, if armed forces are not required to defend the country as there is no military threat to us, they are indecently expensive to maintain, and their only unique purpose is to engage in warfare - do we actually need them? Surely so long as governments have armed forces they are going to be tempted to deploy them on offensive overseas missions, even when that is likely to breach not only national policy, domestic legislation and international human rights obligations as with the recently announced SAS deployment <sup>6</sup>. Where is the public discussion of the ethical issues around such deployments?

There is only one question out of the ten asked in the Review that even comes close to touching on these matters: " When and how should military capabilities be used for non-military purposes to support the work of other (civilian) government agencies?"<sup>7</sup> - "never" would be the obvious answer to that.

If you intend to make a submission to the Review, it would be really useful if you could include the point that it does not start with, nor even include, the most important question - whether or not we need armed forces at all.

It should be noted that the Review is not restricted to the role of the armed forces in terms of their deployment, equipment demands and so on, as: "during the period of the Review itself, the Associate Minister of Defence will lead concurrent companion studies into:

- New Zealand's Defence Industry, examining options for economic improvement in the sector;
- The role of the New Zealand Defence Force in Youth Programmes and the New Zealand Cadet Force; and

- Voluntary National Service, including examining future options for a whole of government strategy."<sup>8</sup>

In some respects this is even scarier than the main part of the Review - it remains to be seen if these studies will lead to an increase in military and weapons related production and export, in brainwashing children with military ideas and "values", and to the reintroduction of conscription.

## 2) Where you can get information about the Review

The main Defence Review 2009 page is at <http://www.defence.govt.nz/defence-review.html> - the Terms of Reference are at <http://www.defence.govt.nz/review09/terms-reference.html> and the page with information about public consultation (which includes several online and emailable options for making a submission) is at <http://www.defence.govt.nz/review09/public-consultation.html>

We are really interested in hearing what peace people and groups are saying in their submissions to the Review, so please consider sending a copy by email to Peace Movement Aotearoa [pma@xtra.co.nz](mailto:pma@xtra.co.nz) or by post to us at PO Box 9314, Wellington 6141 - please indicate when you send it if it is for our files only or if you are happy to have your submission available online for others to read. If you are agreeable to that, your submission will be uploaded to the web page at <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/defrev09.htm> Thank you

## References

<sup>1</sup> Defence Review 2009 - <http://www.defence.govt.nz/defence-review.html>

<sup>2</sup> The Government's Defence Policy Framework, June 2000 - <http://www.defence.govt.nz/pdfs/archive-publications/def-pol-framework-June2000.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> 'Commanders respond', Proceedings Magazine, US Naval Institute, March 2009 Vol. 135/3/1,273 - [http://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/story.asp?STORY\\_ID=1808](http://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/story.asp?STORY_ID=1808)

<sup>4</sup> See note 3 above

<sup>5</sup> See note 2 above

<sup>6</sup> See for example, NZ SAS: complicity in torture and civilian casualties, Peace Movement Aotearoa, 11 August 2009 - <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/nzsas09a.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Defence Review 2009, question 6

<sup>8</sup> Defence Review 2009 Terms of Reference, Scope: point 10