

There are no immediate threats to Australia and yet our military budget has leapt to \$27b a year – over 2% of GDP and making us the 11th biggest arms spender in the world.

Expenditure on 100 'Joint Strike Fighters', 3 air warfare destroyers, 2 large amphibious ships and 12 new submarines will add over \$60b. This equipment has been heavily criticised as outdated and expensive. For instance a range of diesel-electric submarines that are extremely stealthy and would be effective in defending our borders without threatening our neighbours is available at a cost of around a sixth of the price of one air warfare destroyer. This spending is also inconsistent with our role in the region and defence strategies that ought to prioritise peaceful engagement, international cooperation and supporting and stabilising our own immediate region.

The war in Afghanistan is proving to be ineffective with Afghans showing increasing resentment to US and NATO military activity and its toll on civilians. Far from being defeated, the Taliban have capitalised on this antagonism, strengthening their stronghold in the Pashtun south, further threatening the viability of the central government.

US aid has recently been withdrawn because of corruption and services and effective governance are in decline. Fighting drug production has also failed and while the Taliban is not popular in many areas its influence is spreading, funded by this trade. A new approach is needed that may well involve partition of Afghanistan. It is time now to engage with the 'enemy' for a local solution.

The Democrats have a long history of peaceful engagement. We led on nuclear disarmament and opposing weapons testing and the war on Iraq. We pushed for parliament to decide on going to war and introduced private bills to ban cluster munitions and establish a peace commission.

..... peace, not war in **Defence**

Our Plan

International engagement

- Shift the overall focus of defence strategy from intensive combat in distant conflicts to engagement under the UN flag, self-reliance, regional security and peace keeping activity and maximising the capability to defend Australia from military attack
- Press at the UN for local, negotiated solutions to longstanding conflicts, particularly in Israel/Palestine and in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan canvas solutions that engage rather than fight the Taliban and the military insurgents. Australian troops should have only a limited engagement there in peace-keeping roles.
- Shift where possible from bilateral to multilateral defence agreements with built in human rights standards

Military hardware

- Cancel contracts for Joint Strike Fighters and remaining Air Warfare Destroyers, cutting \$30b from forward spending
- Establish an independent review process for major defence acquisitions to ensure military hardware:
 - is cost effective and better suited to a defensive role
 - adheres to international norms
 - minimises civilian impacts
 - does not include cluster munitions of any sort
- Withdraw all support for the US Missile Defence (Star Wars) system and oppose militarisation of space
- Where possible, manufacture defence equipment domestically and where impractical maintain a diverse range of source countries

Peace-building

- a better resourced but lighter armed force capable of undertaking emergency, security and peacekeeping operations in our immediate region
- increase spending on land mine and cluster munitions clearing
- a peace and non-violence commission to provide non-military solutions to conflict and security issues and to revive disarmament efforts
- Amend the Australian Constitution to require Parliamentary approval before going to war.