

Promoting security: militarism or diplomacy?

by Professor John Langmore

MAPW War & Militarism series



- National security involves more than protection from external threats; military security is only one aspect.
- Recent Australian governments have generously funded defence and intelligence agencies while failing to adequately fund diplomacy.
- Funding for diplomacy must be increased to enable Australia to build its capacity for engagement in peaceful conflict resolution.

Security and national wellbeing

One of the principal qualities voters want from governments is security. Security is sometimes interpreted simply as defence from external threat but the term naturally includes everything which contributes to human security.

When he was defence minister, Joel Fitzgibbon asserted in the [2009 Defence White Paper](#) that, "There is no greater responsibility for a national government than the defence of the nation, its people and their interests." This familiar claim for the pre-eminence of military spending should, however, be put in context. Protection from external threats is one aspect of national and personal security but so are an adequate income, opportunities for employment, environmental sustainability, high quality health and education services, safety on the streets and much more. Fitzgibbon's claim exaggerates the importance of defence in peacetime. Military security is only one aspect of national wellbeing.

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The White Paper followed through with the unprecedented plan to increase real Australian military spending by 2 or 3 per cent each year for the next twenty years. No other area of Commonwealth outlays had ever been promised such largesse for such a ludicrously long period.

The 2010-11 budget increased the net allocation for Defence by about \$1.9 billion, over 70 per cent more than the *total outlays* on diplomacy through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Cuts were made to military spending in the 2012-13 budget for the same reasons as they were in the US and UK, to achieve fiscal restraint, and also because this was readily possible due to actual and planned troop withdrawals from Iraq and Afghanistan. So far there has been no commitment to policy change involving cuts or cancellation of highly costly planned purchases of joint strike fighters or submarines.

The government would be on firm electoral ground in making such cuts. A Roy Morgan opinion poll at the beginning of 2012 reported that only 1 per cent of Australians think military security is the most important problem facing Australia. The proportion of respondents who support higher defence spending has been falling steadily during the last decade. Community preferences are for improvements in health and education services, infrastructure and opportunities for employment.



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Balancing military spending with increased diplomacy

Recent Australian governments have mimicked the US by generously funding defence and intelligence agencies but failing to adequately finance diplomacy.

The planned expansion of Australia's arsenal of sophisticated weaponry is inconsistent with the commitment required of all UN member states to seek peaceful resolution of conflict. Article 2 of the [UN Charter](#) states that members must act in accordance with charter principles, the third of which is that, 'All Members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security and justice, are not endangered.'

For the last decade and a half Australia has not been implementing the spirit or the letter of the commitments required of all member states of the UN. Australia now has fewer diplomats posted overseas than we did in 1995. We have only ninety-four overseas missions compared with the Western country average of 135. Why should diplomacy, the instrument supposed to sustain a global and regional web of relationships and cooperative arrangements, receive one twenty-fifth of the funds allocated to defence?

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It is vital that funding for diplomacy be substantially and rapidly increased so as to enable the opening of new missions, and the increased appointment and training of qualified diplomats. Steadily improved staffing would also allow the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to build its capacity for engagement in peaceful conflict resolution through bilateral and multilateral analysis, consultation, mediation, negotiation and the other means listed in the UN Charter.

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ANZUS treaty

Increased diplomacy is also the highest priority for implementing Australia's commitments in the [ANZUS Treaty](#) for the first Article commits the parties 'to settle any international disputes in which they may be involved by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security are not endangered and to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.' Using ANZUS as a wedge to justify involvement in US military action while undermining the UN Charter is a misrepresentation of the ANZUS treaty.

UN Security Council

Election to the [UN Security Council](#) would offer Australia opportunities to help increase the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Security Council as a forum for peaceful conflict resolution and management, and give us a role in addressing many global issues as they arise. It would be a demanding but potentially extremely valuable calling.



Further reading

Firth, Stewart (2011) *Australia in International Politics*, 3rd ed, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest

Langmore, John (2005) *Dealing with America: the UN, the US and Australia*, UNSW Press, Sydney

Reus-Smit, Christian (2004) *American Power and World Order*, Polity, Cambridge

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