



PRIME MINISTER

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, 8 NOVEMBER 1994 THE DEFENCE WHITE PAPER

Mr Speaker,

The White Paper on defence which is being presented in this chamber sets out a framework for developing Australian defence policy over the next decade, and for making force structure and capability decisions which will shape our defence force well into the next century.

All Australian Governments have a core responsibility to defend this country.

Uniquely among the nations of the world, we have a continent of our own to protect.

In defence terms, this gives us some real advantages, not least the moat around us. But it also imposes enormous responsibilities. The way we meet those responsibilities is in a very real sense a measure of our sense of our nationhood.

Defending Australia is a substantial document, and I congratulate the Minister and those officials and members of the Defence Force who were involved in its preparation.

It is a document for this time - a time of rapid change in the region and the world. A period of less obvious threat than the Cold War years, but of less certainty as well.

The White Paper reflects that underlying strategic uncertainty. The rapid growth in the Asia-Pacific region and the changes in regional relationships confronts Australia with both opportunities and challenges in its defence planning.

For example, the very fluidity of the post-Cold War world gives us an opportunity for the first time to build up organisations like APEC and the

ASEAN Regional Forum. But that same fluidity makes it even more important that we succeed.

Mr Speaker,

The White Paper therefore reflects this Government's strong determination to ensure that Australia maintains the most effective possible defence capability.

Defending Australia sets out comprehensively how this will be done, and the details have been outlined in this House by my colleague, the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel.

The Government will sustain defence spending at about two per cent of GDP, and for the first time ever we will institute a five-year defence budget commitment from 1996-97.

At the core of Australian defence policy is self-reliance, by which we mean the capability to defend ourselves against any credible attack on Australia without relying on the combat forces of other countries.

The White Paper's defence equipment decisions are all directed towards strengthening that self-reliant capability.

These decisions include the purchase of airborne early warning and control aircraft, the replacement of the Macchi lead-in fighters, new transport aircraft, helicopters for the ANZAC frigates, minehunters and improved command, control, communications and intelligence networks.

We will also review the need for additional Collins class submarines in the context of our first five-year defence budget.

Mr Speaker,

Just over a year ago I attended the launch of the first of the Collins class submarines in Adelaide, and earlier this year I saw the launch of the first ANZAC frigate.

Both programs are clear evidence of how Australian design, technology, construction techniques and workforce skills can excel against the best in the world.

Collins is the most advanced conventionally powered submarine in the world - a clear demonstration of this country's ability to produce world-class technology at competitive prices.

I believe that by building up our national ship-building base through projects like these, and the coastal minehunters, we are also building up a capability that can be a real resource for co-operative programs with our neighbours.

And the capabilities of Australian industry are not limited to large-scale construction programs. We are also developing state-of-the-art skills in high technology areas such as weapons and sensors.

The Jindalee Over-the-Horizon radar system and the NULKA active expendable decoy are both examples of the innovation and ingenuity of Australian defence science.

Mr Speaker,

The White Paper is about more than enhancing our defence self-reliance, however.

Our security also depends on the extent to which we can improve our strategic environment, both by building bilateral regional defence relationships and working multilaterally to enhance regional and global security.

The White Paper outlines how the Government is doing these things.

Multilaterally, we continue to support the United Nations, both its preventative diplomacy and its peacekeeping operations.

We do not structure the Australian Defence Force for such operations, but the ADF has shown that its force structure and readiness levels are sufficient to undertake United Nations tasks. Men and women from the ADF, as well as from the Australian Federal Police, have already served with distinction and effectiveness in many peacekeeping operations around the globe, and continue to do so today.

Regionally, we have been working to build institutions which will provide a framework for co-operation in the very different environment we now face.

APEC is one important development. Although it does not itself have a political or security role, and Australia is not seeking this, APEC certainly has strategic benefits. By bringing both sides of the Asia-Pacific into a broad economic partnership it makes less likely the attenuation of security ties between the United States and its Asian allies as a result of trade frictions.

Australia has also been a very active proponent and supporter of the ASEAN Regional Forum. When this group met for the first time in Bangkok in July this year, it was the first time the countries of the region had sat down at the same table to discuss security issues.

The Forum is still at a very early stage of its development, but we think it has the potential to help us deal more effectively with future problems or tensions in the region.

Mr Speaker,

The strength and durability of our bilateral defence relationships with our neighbours has been critical in underpinning the growing regional consensus on security issues which in turn made the ASEAN Regional Forum possible.

One of the key elements in the White Paper is the Government's commitment to strengthening defence links with the countries of the region - to strategic partnership.

The general approach outlined in the White Paper has been welcomed by our neighbours.

A senior adviser to the Indonesian Defence Minister recently described Defending Australia as a 'watershed in the strategic outlook of Australia,' paving the way for a strategic partnership with Indonesia.

I agree. And I agree with the Indonesian Defence Minister, General Edi Sudradjat, who said ' a good relationship between Indonesia and Australia is not a matter of choice. It is a must.'

In my view, that is true across the board, not just in the defence area.

Earlier this year the Indonesian and Australian Defence Ministers agreed to hold annual meetings, and the potential exists to expand areas of practical co-operation between our military forces.

We are also building our defence relationship with other neighbours in the Asia-Pacific.

Singapore is already conducting air force and army training in Australia, and Prime Minister Goh and I have talked about other areas of defence co-operation.

With Malaysia, too, we have a long and mutually rewarding defence relationship, both through the Five Power Defence Arrangements and bilaterally.

In 1995, for the first time, regional countries will participate in our major military exercise, Kangaroo.

And the White Paper underlines the continuing importance of our defence alliance with New Zealand, involving mutual commitment by each country to the security of the other.

Mr Speaker,

Some commentators have seen a tension in the two objectives of defence self-reliance and greater strategic engagement with the countries around us. But no such tension exists.

In defence policy no less than in other areas of Australia's engagement with Asia, our efforts to improve our own capacities as a nation and our ability to operate successfully in the region are two sides of the same coin.

Mr Speaker,

The security and stability of Asia will be increasingly determined by the policies and activities of countries in the region.

But in the Government's view, this cannot, and will not, be achieved without the continued and constructive engagement of the United States, which remains the world's largest economy, Asia's largest single trading partner, and the world's most capable military power.

This Government believes that continued engagement by the United States in the Asia-Pacific through its network of alliances around the Western Pacific is important to regional stability and security. As I said earlier, our concern about the consequences for strategic links across the Pacific of any increase in trade and economic friction is one of the reasons we think APEC is such a good economic model for the region.

But the United States alliance is important for reasons much more particular to Australia. Although we do not rely on the United States for the defence of Australia, the deterrent effect of the alliance to any possible enemy makes a central contribution to our national security. And it also provides Australia with very important access to intelligence and technology.

Mr Speaker,

The White Paper underlines the importance not just of equipment and the strategic environment, but of our people.

That is exactly as it should be, because the highly trained and highly motivated men and women of our defence force are the key to the ADF's capabilities. And in the new environment our capabilities will depend more and more on the human factor - better commanders, higher levels of skill, more individual initiative and more effective teamwork.

I was very proud earlier in the year to be able to farewell in Townsville some of the Australian forces going off to Rwanda to serve with the United Nations mission there.

The men and women at the airport were on their way to conditions which very few Australians have experienced, and many would find difficult to imagine. But the enthusiasm and morale of the troops, as well as their obvious high level of competence was very evident. It reflected very well on them and on those who recruited and trained them. And it has been reflected, too, in their performance since they arrived in Rwanda, as their colleagues have shown earlier in Somalia and Cambodia and elsewhere.

The Government understands that military life continues to place particular and difficult demands on those who serve in the ADF and on their families. So the Government will provide Australian Defence Force personnel with a package of pay, conditions of service and other benefits, including housing, designed specifically to address the special features of military service.

Mr Speaker,

Defending Australia also includes the most comprehensive and significant statement on reserves ever made by an Australian Government.

The reserves are important - indeed they are an integral and essential part of the force structure - comprising more than one-third of the uniformed strength of the ADF.

As the White Paper makes clear, the reserves are no longer just a back up to the regular forces, or an expansion base, but with the regular forces, form a total force in which all elements work together in a coordinated and complementary effort. That is an important change in the structure of the ADF.

Mr Speaker,

National security depends on more than the capacity of our defence force. It depends on the strength of our economy; the cohesiveness of our society; the effectiveness of our national institutions, the unity, sense of purpose and confidence of our people.

'Defending Australia' is, therefore, closely related to other government policies. The White Paper on Employment and Training, 'Working Nation', and the Cultural Statement, 'Creative Nation', and no less the development of APEC, have the same overall purpose of this Defence White Paper - to strengthen the fabric and resolve of Australia, to enlarge our capacities and to create a more prosperous and secure future for our children.

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