



THE HON. JOEL FITZGIBBON MP Minister for Defence

Saturday, 2 May 2009

A NEW STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

Australia's strategic outlook over the period to 2030 will be shaped by the changing global distribution of economic, political and military power, and the future role and weight of the United States.

Since the Second World War, Australia's strategic outlook and defence planning has been shaped most fundamentally by the global distribution of power, and in particular the strategic primacy of the United States.

"Globalisation will increase the economic interdependence of states and regions. This, combined with changing patterns of underlying economic power and political influence, will result in an increasingly 'multipolar' global order," said the Minister for Defence, the Hon Joel Fitzgibbon MP.

"War among highly advanced militaries is the most complex and dangerous strategic challenge faced by nations. Preparing for it requires the investment of very significant materiel, technological and human resources. It is the Government's view that it would be premature to judge that war among states, including the major powers, has been eliminated as a feature of the international system," Mr Fitzgibbon said.

"As the Asia-Pacific region becomes more prosperous, we will see an increase in the region's military capability," the Minister said.

"Intra-state conflict will be an enduring feature of conflict in the period to 2030 and the Australian Defence Force needs to be prepared to play its part in dealing with such contingencies," said the Minister.

Further complicating this picture is the convergence of trends such as:

- global demographic change and population movements,
- environmental and resource pressures (whether caused by climate change or other dynamics),
- global public health risks and even transnational crime that will increase the risk of conflict over resources,
- political instability in fragile states, and
- potentially destabilising mass migration flows.

A Defence Force for the 21st Century

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“A fundamental responsibility of Government is to determine how much military power we should seek to develop to meet the strategic risks in our security environment. It remains the case today that Australia is one of the most secure countries in the world. But that does not mean we are destined forever to be secure from external threat. We have to consider the possibility of potentially adverse changes in our strategic outlook, especially in the Asia Pacific region.”

“The probabilities of such changes occurring are low, but not so low as to be beyond contemplation. Of course we should not spend less on defence than prudence would dictate in terms of our strategic outlook and our willingness to accept only a certain degree of risk in relation to our security. If we wish to back up strategic influence with military power, we have to be prepared to invest the resources required,” said the Minister.

The 2009 Defence White Paper represents the most comprehensive statement on Defence ever produced. It affirms the Government’s commitment to the defence of Australia, the protection of our sovereign interests and the security and stability of our region.

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