

Defence Letter - Letter to the Defence Minister

Hon Mark Burton
Minister of Defence
Parliament Buildings
WELLINGTON

Dear Mr Burton,

CURRENT AND FUTURE CONDITION OF THE NZDF

Some might call me an average New Zealand citizen, but then, it is more so that I have found it necessary to forward some collective views on the haggard state of the New Zealand Defence Forces. Also not discounting the less than appurtenant agenda style transformation upon which the NZDF is being forced to undertake. My own views, and those of many others' who have shared them with me in differing forms over the last two years, are presented here.

I am aware that some of the following points do have forecasted remedies but they are perhaps mentioned out of frustration more than the purposes of analysis.

To think that it has become necessary for civilian aircraft and pilots to be used in air defence training with RNZN ships is not only shameful but also quite abysmal. Our Special Forces now have limitations put on them for training with air assets. The radios are obsolete and unreliable I think were the words on the current sets. Dating back to Vietnam era, with no digital burst transmission its unfortunate that the government couldn't also use the word unsafe. Then it might turn the heads of people who actually don't know that much about such things. These are people, New Zealand citizens who have a right to really know about such things, rather than being left in the dark to feed off naivety. All that to be used as a further tool for belated, inadequate or inappropriate defence spending.

Operationally speaking this is foolhardy and dangerous. We expect our people to do their best, to do their jobs yet we continue to make it more and more difficult to do these jobs. It must be reinforced; there are no civilian equivalents to these tasks. We don't need bureaucratic words on how it will 'be OK' nor how resourceful our servicemen and women are, or how well they hold up to the historical reputation. We need to be fair, and reasonable. There is no honour in mixing words. Facts are facts. It is the troops who pay the price for budgetary wrangling.

Recently I read somewhere, an RSA article I believe, of how the lose of the Air Combat Force was an opportunity to 'upskill and retrain'. Well now that's a good way of putting it. Our well-trained and highly respected pilots, navigators and ground crews are now setting their sights on new careers overseas in places like Saudi Arabia, Australia and the UK. And well they might. Respect it seems, not to mention adequate working conditions, comes from overseas, not from home.

Why is it consistently the argument that the Skyhawks have never been used operationally? Why does no politician in power ever comment the reason they were never used is because they were a deterrent to hostilities? That deterrent now is gone. So has 25% of the capacity of ANZAC bilateral air power. They were on call for the deployment to East Timor, and it can be reasonably assumed that the hostile acts of the Indonesian Airforce were negated because of the likely outcome had their threats been carried out.

What is more worrying is there is nothing realistically proposed to recover the tactical and strategic shortfall from the Skyhawk disbandment. There has been comment made on, for example, an attack helicopter option which would of course make a significant contribution to the land/air and possibly sea component of the New Zealand ORBAT, particularly an option like Sea Cobra equipped with ASW missiles. Sadly they should be proposed on their own merits and not as a replacement option. An attack helicopter is designed for quite different roles and has a different effect from an operational standpoint. Vulnerability and mobility are very different from fast mover fixed wing aircraft, as such they are employed in different ways on the battlefield, or should I say, in peacekeeping operations.

Further to that, the term 'Attack' helicopter is probably not the best term to use in this day and age of political correctness. Far be it from me to state how un-PC being under the gun of an aggressor is when you didn't see sense to have proper counter measures in place. Probably the same reason the Eurocopter Tiger acquisition by Australia has referred to the aircraft as a 'Armed Reconnaissance Helicopter'. The perception that it goes out and has a look about keeping everyone safe while having the capacity to defend itself will go a lot further with certain sectors of the community than would the term 'Attack' helicopter. As such this works well for some like-minded members of government. Stacked upon that is the disturbing and unrealistic tone of the synonymous nature of being anti-nuclear and anti-military. They are not one in the same.

At least the Australians see sense to purchase such equipment. Whether we do is still yet to be seen. Though be it because we have prematurely retired an old but thoroughly capable force before having a suitable replacement. All that said I hope anyone worth their salt in the defence arena realises that attack helicopters are not designed for air interdiction roles against fast mover fixed wing aircraft.

Like many things in life if you have a task to be done, do it with the correct tool, not something that will simply 'make do'.

On the issue of a downsizing of the Airforce in this country New Zealand has a great many Hughes 500 and Jet Ranger Aircraft of which there are several military versions. New Zealand also has a great many skilled pilots. Pilots which are renowned all around the world for their daring and very capable abilities in the air. It makes sense to form an Air Reserve component within the NZDF ORBAT in order to boost the, particularly now, dwindling air component of the Armed Forces. Due to a virtual transparent skill base for flying these helicopters it makes sound economic sense. The Airforce would also be able to tap into the vast experience of these civilian pilots.

As required Reserves would train as the Territorial Force (TF) does now, utilising a mix of civil and military aircraft to further reduce costs. Personnel can be called on for civil emergency operations, for SAR duties and training and be available as Army reserves are, for overseas deployments. Air Reserve would also be a major contribution to the Air Training Corps (ATC) cadets.

In some areas of society people lose large amounts of money, lose jobs or lose their jobs. In defence, it is lives that are lost. As a consequence of inaction or misguided action it must be remembered that not only military but also civilian lives are lost. Also, infrastructure, trade and political will and respect are challenged. How dire is it when such results come about through political correctness, a lack of willingness to do one's part in the wider regional community and wanton restrictions on expenditure for essential services to the society represented? Defence is just as vital as any other major theme that makes up this country.

An average kiwi, late last year was heard to say, '105 chaingun armed, air conditioned LAVs' without air cover or naval escort...'

While we are speaking of chainguns. These are essentially, for all intents and purposes, large calibre direct fire machineguns. I would dearly hope that ATGW, rockets, mortars and other explosive / anti armour / IF weapons were going to be added into the mix for these vehicles which will be quite venerable to ambushes and getting bogged in poorly maintained roads which are typical throughout the region. Unlike tracked vehicles wheeled vehicles have an extremely poor turning circle, again making them very prone to ambush. Even with the infantry dismounted, the eliminated vehicle means a major loss in firepower assets and mobility. Supposedly a major reason for purchasing these vehicles, gone up all thanks to two or three RPG rockets brought for a few local dollars.

Why was the tender for the LAV not inclusive of tracked vehicles? To save money through cheaper maintenance logistically only to lose it in lives on a battlefield or peacekeeping / humanitarian operation is beyond ludicrous. I will take off road mobility and a turn on a dime over an extra twenty kilometres an hour on prepared roads and a four to five point turn any day. Our defence needs are to have the best possible option for our troops to do their jobs properly, safely and efficiently.

If peacekeeping meant nice places, then unarmed police alone would be deployed.

In 1948, the British military historian B. H. Liddell Hart had this to say concerning wheeled vehicles in combat as it related to the German invasion of the Soviet Union,

"The Germans lost the chance of victory because they had based their mobility on wheels instead of on tracks. On these mud-roads the wheeled transport was bogged when the tanks could move on. Panzer forces with tracked transport might have overrun Russia's vital centres long before autumn, despite the bad roads. World War I had shown this need to anyone who used his eyes and his imagination."

There is no assurance that any promises for refit, upgrades or new purchase of any defence equipment will be seen through. To abandon planned acquirement's, to cut them half way through or whatever can occur in the future without public consultation, and be quickly put down to changing needs or changing political climates or the requirements of other areas. We have seen it with the F16 deal; we may yet see it with the LAVIII deal.

Accountability is ever missing. Plenty of issues / requirements have been presented by the MoD, but as to whether these will be effectively catered for is questionable. For example, a modern Army without a modern anti armour capacity is vulnerable. An army without a reliable individual weapon is vulnerable. I even had a politician tell me how good the Australian Steyr was saying he'd used one on the ADF simulators.

He'd obviously never used one in the field. And he made no comment when I mentioned the difference between the Australian and the original Austrian rifles. Superb accuracy should never come at the expense of training, nor should superb training be an excuse to purchase sub-rate equipment.

Public opinion was routed on the Skyhawk deal, so here we discover with some anguish and concern that the democratic process is but a figment of our collective imaginations'. The dangers of the LAVIII class of wheeled vehicles are well documented yet the public is not privy to all the facts. How a tender can possibly work on the principle, 'if someone else has it then...' is beyond me. Ask the USMC what they think of the LAV, and then ask the Australians why they prefer to upgrade their M113 APC as opposed to getting more LAV type vehicles. LAVIII is tailored to our needs? I don't think so.

We can be part of the Echelon program yet our Defence Force personnel have a sub-rate issue rifle. It has become harder and harder for a citizen of this country to obtain a firearms licence. I'm at a loss with that considering the sorts of things this nation was founded on, yet soldiers sailors and airmen suffer the raw quandary of a sufferable issue weapon.

Expecting troops to deploy anywhere in the world, from East Timor to Kuwait, whether you are rampantly opposed to the inherent concept of military forces' or not, please provide them with the right equipment, and equipment that works.

I have witnessed the rise in peoples' patriotism with events in East Timor, and that is great to see. As a result I hope, and it appears to be the case, that people are becoming more and more astute in military issues. They are searching out the facts and are now willing to read, study and discuss issues of this nature. Before it was tapu, like some unwritten evil in the air.

My hope is that this does lead down the road of correct acquirement under heavy public pressure.

It's interesting that a country of 4 million doesn't have a problem with their military industry. Yes, Singapore. But then again they have been invaded in the last hundred years. They produce all their own equipment and politics doesn't stop them from buying what they want from whom ever they want. They produce corvettes, much more suitable for New Zealand conditions, and requirements. All suitably tailored for our pathetic budget allowed for Defence spending. Everything we could ever want and need for the NZDF right there, and we could actually produce it all ourselves, as they can, right here. Please remember there are people out there who would just jump for a chance at a place like New Zealand and all its fine resources. I would draw attention to fishing and forestry. Who would do such a thing to such a beautiful peace-loving nation? Even if it is highly unlikely, it's not the point. The point is the principle.

Industry, social security and defence are all intimately linked. Without one the others will suffer. It is time to stop making excuses, passing the buck. Then New Zealand can return to that historical prosperity its people deserve. Also those who make excuses about defence and compare any effective modern initiatives with the Maginot line simply have no understanding of defence or how it is best implemented in a country such as ours.

Remember what Kiwis did in Singapore? Well those that were there don't forget and neither do the citizens of that country. That is why, low and behold they actually make a point of ensuring such things don't happen again. For those who don't think that having a well trained, modernised and capable Defence Force is very politically correct, then perhaps talking to the East Timorese might put that view into a real world perspective.

Countries like Singapore do not make excuses. Countries like Switzerland do not make excuses. We have no excuse but we still make them. How Kiwi is that?

Food for thought for those that can think. A nation's military is what stands between the oppressor and those who wish to assert their 'rights' to believe what they wish upon those whom remain unprotected and vulnerable, those who think having a military is a privilege not a necessity.

Riding on the backs of the Australians, eg: with defence capacity when we can no longer provide 25% of localised Air Combat capacity, and now lack the ability to meet training requirements with the RAAF. Not only that we have lost the single asset which allowed us the capacity to counter a threat like that of September 11. It seems that, by such policy, which has crippled the NZDF, there must be something inherently wrong with a nation to possess the ability to defend itself, even by mild standards. I wouldn't have seen it as wrong or evil but an unfortunate expenditure due to human nature, 'the nature of the beast' if you will.

One only needs to look to the Philippines, Bougainville, Fiji or East Timor for some nearby examples. We have been able to prevent serious escalations in such places. We now leave it wide open for antagonists to do their worst. Groups like Laskar Jihad and Abu Sayyaf are real. To treat any potential threat to your nation as incompetent or incapable is contemptuous. Deficient and misplaced defence policy is an open invitation to the unthinkable. Especially, it must be emphasised, in a country such as ours. I most certainly don't see this strategic environment as 'benign' which I believe is how the Prime Minister referred to it. And so we leave the security of our children, the future of this nation to chance.

If we can't help in the defence of Australia then why should we expect them to defend us? Other nations', potential aggressors / antagonists do watch the goings on of the world. Australia forms the Incident Response Regiment, and we disband our Skyhawks. This is not in our interests and does not in any way match our needs.

To quote the Defence Industry Conference 2002 in Canberra,

'The emerging trends and challenges identified in the White Paper and demonstrated so tragically on 11 September are likely to continue. They have been shown to be more substantial than originally thought. Indeed, some analysts see these new challenges as the primary focus of security for now and the foreseeable future.'

To say we can't afford such essential assets in our society is inexcusable. We must play our fair part. It is intrinsically connected to how foreign powers view us with regards trade and economics. In the plainest possible way, it demonstrates our willingness, lack thereof, to defend those very things, which keep the country free and prosperous. If we are unwilling to defend it then we are not worthy to hold it. You can't keep what you can't defend. I came across one fellow who said that Defence is like house or fire insurance, you don't stop paying for it because it most likely won't happen to you.

Indeed it is a different world to the 70's but it is no less unstable, simply put it is a less predictable environment than the cold war period. And things are becoming less stable in this region, considered in fact to be the least stable region in the world by many global strategists.

Our Special Forces can be a critical part of countering al-Qaeda by way of providing forward reconnaissance yet we still have to scrounge for equipment, and some photos of our forces' show mismatched uniforms as if we represent some third world nation.

We do not even have a maritime specialist force for counter terrorism, a specific point that, regardless of our prestigious historical record and reputation, must be the laughing stock of our allies considering we have such a vast coastline. The Navy already has enough on its plate. The Army shouldn't have to stretch out to provide maritime forces, for example using the SAS more often than not.

Our geographic make up dictates that we should have a specialist component as part of the NZDF for these purposes. We have no Marine detachment, no word on how Fast Attack gunboats could be purchased to effectively patrol that coastline. Yes it costs money. But money well, and wisely, spent.

Perhaps it has suddenly become a point of discussion post September 11? I don't know. So our Army, Airforce and Navy must bare the brunt, the responsibility if and when something of this nature does occur. Not the government, when things go wrong, but the Armed Forces. That is where public outcry lands.

To put it in very raw terms, no matter how unlikely, a foreign power has ten C-130 aircraft. On each of those planes we hypothetically have a collection of 70 paratroops and 10 Special Forces operatives. I am not a negative person by nature, but a realistic one. Of those ten aircraft these troops are committed to make the ultimate sacrifice to see out a particular political aim, hereby being the spearhead by which those aims will be met. Each soldier has 300 rounds of ammunition, and minimal support weapons. Each Special Forces team has explosives and will use these to destroy critical infrastructure for purposes of initial control of the populace. These sites are not guarded in any way. We have no RNZAF Regiment, which could, if instated make such a theory very unrealistic. Fear is an incredible tool. Ignorance even more so.

The Mercury power crisis for example was an accident and not the result of malicious deliberate and well executed military action. Imagine the damage already done. Australia or US could not respond with significant weight, nor should they considering we are unable to make reasonable efforts for our own self-defence.

To say we can not afford an adequate Air Defence is shameful, and the consequences could well be beyond our imagining. Five very low-level air defence (VLLAD) launchers from France of all places simply do not cut the mustard. They might sound impressive to the uninitiated but without such assets being complimented with other forms of Air Defence, is to be frank, laughable.

Too hope and pray that a RNZN frigate is present with its means of air defence is well, just that, hope.

It is up there with ignoring the requirements for ASW. We have witnessed only recently where submarines can shadow our own forces, and those of our closest allies, but of course, a largely unaware population, one which is not informed, can easily be coerced into believing no threat exists, much less the consequences if threats were fully realised. It is not about money, it's about lives, New Zealand lives, and a freedom we apparently hold high but are unwilling to pay the cost to maintain.

The people have spoken and they have been ignored.

War is about exploiting weaknesses, where and when they make themselves known. To say we have no enemies is foolish, after all before a war begins; we are not so quick to speak of others in such ways. Perhaps it was too long ago when Japanese submarines shadowed these shores. Even Russian ones. Modern times make us no more immune to the real threats than time has the historical ones.

Distance and remoteness is no longer our ally but our enemy. Modern technology means aircraft travel further, faster and are intrinsically more lethal than ever before. Early warning systems are fine, so long as you have something substantial to counter the given threat. We do not. I just get out my history books and recall what Peter Fraser said after Greece and Crete that the Army would not go into combat again without air power. That was in 1941. Have we not had enough examples over the last decade of how decisive a component air power is in conflict? Since we are taking the selfish road then we perhaps should in fact look at this, and ask ourselves, if nothing else, where is the air power for our own forces'?

A modern force must be self-sufficient, not counting on other forces' to provide such critical assets as air defence, air cover or logistical support. It should not be counted on that a nation's civilian population or assets are mandatory to perform military operations whatever form they might take. This includes Humanitarian aid missions or other 'operations other than war' missions.

We are unable to see this sort of requirement through, even in the broadest terms. This is unacceptable for our troops, for those we wish to help; to our country and to any global partners we may have now or in the future. Pulling tight the purse strings on any Defence spending is ridiculous, and to have any arm fighting for scraps over another is just as foolhardy. All elements of the NZDF need a fair share, and a fair go. Otherwise, they all suffer. And that goes well beyond any honouring of treaties or agreements we have made. The gravest of results I am sure you can conclude without coaching.

Additionally, no matter how unlikely it is that New Zealand is attacked, in a conventional sense or otherwise, or those it is responsible for, there is no confusion as to what the NZDF role is. First and foremost it is present to provide security for New Zealand's people and the nation's interests. It is a Defence Force. If its primary role were to change, then I would appreciate a name change to prevent future confusion.

My father was on forty-eight hour stand by for two and a half years for deployment to Vietnam. My Grandfather was in the RNZN during the Second World War as a radar operator, watching, guarding our shoreline. My Great Uncle was killed overseas in the same war by a German sniper. A close friend was deployed to Kuwait in recent years. Friends have been involved in East Timor and the Gulf War, and I know several former and current members of the RNZAF who have had to trample through the quagmire of ill treatment, disregard and bureaucracy sent their way.

Each year, one day alone is meant to be our day for remembering our service men and women. Now it is but half a day. But it seems commerce is more important now. One day a year to remember why we have commerce at all. For those who make defence policy I wonder how they could have such a veil over their eyes. For many involved any practical meaning that single day has must surly be brought into question.

Although I don't want assurances, I would welcome some feedback on defence issues. I make no apologies for the severity of my language for I believe the consequences of a defence policy guided by an unrealistic view of the world and its real and potential threats are much more severe.

Yours Sincerely,

Leon Harrison

The Reply

In reply please quote:

MOD/473/02

12 September 2002

<ADDRESS>

Dear Leon

Thank you for your letter of 9 September 2002 to the Minister of Defence, Hon Mark Burton concerning your perspective on New Zealand Defence Policy.

Your letter has been placed before the Minister for his consideration.

Yours sincerely

D.R. Ferner

Major

Private Secretary: Defence

The Reply PART II

The Defence Minister Mark Burton responded with the following;

Dear Leon

Thank you for your letter dated 9 September 2002. I have noted your comments and would like to respond to a number of issues you raised.

I acknowledge your concern for New Zealand's defence but do not agree with your statement that New Zealand's defence forces are in a 'haggard state'. The government stated in its 8 May 2001 *Government Defence Statement* that it is building a modern, professional, and well-equipped Defence Force with the necessary military capabilities across all three services to meet New Zealand's objectives. The Defence Force will be able both to meet New Zealand's own defence and security needs and make a useful contribution when it is deployed overseas.

Defence Equipment

With regards your comments about specific defence equipment requirements and the need for a commitment to defence equipment, the government issued its *Defence Long-Term Development Plan* in June 2002. The plan commits up to \$1 billion of new funding for defence over the next ten years. By including projects already improved, and depreciation funding, total spending on defence equipment will likely exceed \$3 billion over the next decade. This funding will be directed at the Navy, Army and Air Force. The government is confident that this programme will enhance New Zealand's overall defence capabilities.

The *Long-Term Development Plan* clearly sets out New Zealand's defence equipment priorities. The plan is an essential component of the government's aim to achieve depth rather than breadth in New Zealand's defence capability. Decisions about equipment have been made by taking into account New Zealand's broad security environment and the requirements of the New Zealand Defence Force in terms of the tasks set for it by the government.

We have made decisions on a number of significant equipment priorities. Earlier this year the Army, including the Special Forces, was issued with tactical mobile radios. The possibility of purchasing medium range anti-armour weapons is currently being explored. There are plans to replace the Iroquois utility and Sioux training helicopters with a capacity that meets New Zealand's contemporary needs.

The government made the decision to purchase wheeled light armoured vehicles (the LAVIII) instead of tracked armoured vehicles, not because of cost, but because of the Army's operational requirements. It was determined that the longer range and speed of the wheeled armoured vehicle was more appropriate for the Army's requirements. Further, a mixed fleet of wheeled and tracked light armoured vehicles would have been more expensive and operationally more difficult to sustain. Aside from the deployable battalion vehicles, specialist tools, test equipment and simulation equipment may also have been required. The essential thing to note in relation to this issue is that wheeled light armoured vehicles were and are the Army's preferred option.

Air Force

The Royal New Zealand Air Force is resourced and structured to deliver the capabilities required of it by government policy. The maintenance of sufficient numbers of personnel, including pilots, with the requisite skills to meet levels of capacity directed by government policy requires careful balancing of the resources required to train and sustain these personnel in their relevant military and technical skills.

With regard your suggestion that an air reserve should be formed, a small number of military pilots are retained on the Active Reserve of the Royal New Zealand Air Force as a means of providing some additional capacity to that maintained within the Regular Force. The use of Active Reserve pilots is normally restricted to non-operational flying duties and training roles. The Regular Force numbers are maintained to meet the commitments required by government policy. The costs involved in keeping a larger number of Active Reserve pilots current in the required military skills would be prohibitive.

Australia

In terms of funding, it is difficult to make comparisons with Australia as New Zealand has its own unique policy circumstances and defence requirements. New Zealand and Australia continue to enjoy an effective and stable working defence relationship. The recent ministerial talks between the Australian Defence Minister, Senator Robert Hill and me, highlighted the importance of the New Zealand-Australia defence relationship. We acknowledged that while both countries often have similar strategic objectives outside the region, they may have different approaches to achieving them. Nonetheless, the New Zealand Defence Force and Australian Defence Force has worked together successfully in East Timor, Bougainville, and Solomon Islands to promote peace and stability with the region.

We are committed to encouraging more collaboration between New Zealand and Australian defence forces on doctrine, training, and capability. Far from "riding on the back" of Australians, as you suggested, New Zealand makes a unique and useful contribution to regional security. Current defence policy seeks to make that contribution one that focuses on doing what we do well. rather than trying to retain a broad range of capabilities that are outside our requirements and prohibitively expensive.

Memorial Day

Finally, I would like to personally acknowledge your family members and friends for their contribution to New Zealand's defence activities. The efforts of these people will always be remembered and as a country we owe them a debt of gratitude. As Minister of Defence, it is my task to ensure that all members of the New Zealand Defence Forces are treated well and fairly. I can assure you that Defence Force representatives continue to have a strong presence at memorial commemorations around the country.

Yours sincerely

Hon Mark Burton

Minister of Defence

Comments

Objectives are policy and these change with government to government depending on agenda and views. Hardly an argument to support that the right things are being done. This is perspective after all, as are whether or not one thinks they can be met, or by what means.

Apparently someone who takes the time to write to the Defence minister regarding his given portfolio does not take the time to read any documents pertaining to the job, or current policy. Rather more dangerous I think is the prospect that those in power would not do just such things, much less acknowledge any materials or discuss with those who have direct practical experience, anything that might contravene said policy.

Defence spending. Numbers are funny things they can make anything look good if put across in the right way. By whose judgement is the funding well spent and who says that any given project (usually the wise decisions) will not be reneged on in the future. Much like any other area of governance. Nice to include depreciation funding. That's a fancy word for, things eventually wear out. We shouldn't really talk about things wearing out. It doesn't really matter in Defence if things wear out, people just get killed. I would have thought that depreciation not need be mentioned, that it would be part and parcel of any such funding. Not impressed at all. You would hope that this 'likely' funding would be directed at all three branches wouldn't you?

No one would argue that our strength, land forces wise, lies in our Infantry. Yet we are being mobilised which directly threatens our ability to operate in close country and in urban environments and reduce our Light Infantry capabilities.

'The possibility of purchasing medium range anti-armour weapons is currently being explored.'

How many times have I made statements about this subject? Explored? Man alive, you would think someone who had the top job would have some concept of the modern battlefield. Yet again a statement not unlike many others' I have struck which defies belief. The following statement on rotary wing aircraft is very similar in nature. So was it the government who made the decision to purchase the LAVIII or was it the Army's preferred option? No comments made on the restrictive nature of the tender, nor any research gone into those, such as the USMC or the Australians as to their experiences with these vehicles. Also any savings in fuel consumption is lost because the vehicle is unable to take direct routes due to terrain it is restricted by. Then we are told it was not due to cost, yet so many different official MoD statements talk of the increased cost of tracked vehicles. If it is not an issue then why mention it? Yes the LAVIII has increased range, but how on earth can increased speed, which is only beneficial on well maintained rear echelon type roads be a substantial argument for the case of this vehicle? 'not because of cost', shortly followed by 'more expensive' seems more than a little contradictory to me.

The government is confident that this programme will enhance New Zealand's overall defence capabilities.

Current defence policy seeks to make that contribution one that focuses on doing what we do well. rather than trying to retain a broad range of capabilities that are outside our requirements and prohibitively expensive.

Again more contradiction. Again the last piece is all relative on how you look at the world and the job expected. What we do well... We do all things well in Defence, on an international scale. But agenda dictates we will not able to perform in many areas very well in the future.

Policy doesn't shape the world. The world situation should shape policy.

Radio sets, these are something that should have been in place during the last Labour governance, if not the previous term and their having being finally acquired should not be used as some political tool to demonstrate the government's goodwill towards the Defence Forces'. Similar ploys are used in other industry and essential services of our society.

'Prohibitive' - no explanation. All well and good having an Air Reserve, but if it can't fly or do any adequate training as part of the greater NZDF / RNZAF then there it has very limited, if any, practical use at all. My proposition is to make it a real and substantial component and yet a single very broad word wholly dismisses the idea.

Excuses or 'its in the works' or blaming previous governments doesn't wash. A threat is here and now. Not a few days down track nor is it something that can always be dealt with by our allies. What will it take to convince them of this?

Of course the relationship between New Zealand and Australia is important. Mister Burton is hardly going to tell me that the Australian Defence Minister told him New Zealand wasn't pulling its weight. I read, like many others' in this country. Australia's view on New Zealand Defence policy speaks volumes enough for itself without me furthering its cause.

To 'make that contribution one that focuses on doing what we do well', I wonder how many truly know what we do well on the world stage? Few is my guess and the government is sure to ensure that the people of this country remain ignorant of just how good our service men and women of this country are at so many things. After all, it suits there needs.

Final bit - I suppose if I wanted a cherry on top I would have gone to Farmers, but there again it was nice for him to show his gratitude. The art of politicking. These days its hard to draw the distinction between politics and genuine words of compassion.

'As Minister of Defence, it is my task to ensure that all members of the New Zealand Defence Forces are treated well and fairly.'

How well and fairly were the crews, families and other personnel of the Strike squadrons of the RNZAF treated? Uprooted from their homes to find careers in other parts of the world were 'well and fair' means something quite different. How well were Army personnel treated where it took a major deployment to East Timor before their minuscule pays were increased? When the limelight shines one is quick to take action. If you want an example of how the traditional Kiwi spirit is dying, look no further than the government as per Defence.

SAS in Decline

The SAS operate with second and third generation equipment. The SAS gain new light vehicles and communications equipment but lose its capacity to work with air power and cannot guarantee they will receive the support provided by the frigate force and Orions. As a former Commanding Officer of 1NZSAS Group said,

Without air combat SAS cannot be qualified as FACs [Forward Air Controllers]. This is a fundamental Special Forces skill. Combat air may well be the only form of friendly fire that SAS may be able to call on to extricate selves and more critically may be the destructive fire used in a mission.

The SAS FAC course was upgraded to be NATO compliant. I had to train SAS to this standard for UN peacekeeping. You can say 75 Squadron contributed directly to the preparation of SAS for peacekeeping missions.

It is unclear whether the SAS will receive funding for adequate levels of FAC training. If they do not, that effectiveness will decline.

There are not comments on key points raised such as;

- . Air Defence
- . Terrorist Scenario proposed
- . Close Air Support
- . Alternative armaments for the LAV III
- . Specific view of Australian position on New Zealand policy
- . Instability of our region
- . Other regional countries' moves in Defence

I fail to see how any organisation can promote and enforce any kind peace when it has in inability to defend itself. Hope is a well meaning sentiment that has no place on any Battlefield or any hostile environment.

Your comments are welcomed. Please e-mail me (Leon T. Harrison) at juniØr@orcon.net.nz or sent them via snail mail to:

P.O. Box 11-775

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