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TARGET: Andrew Wilkie says changing our nuclear-free legislation could be risky.

Don't relax nuclear policy, warns intelligence analyst

by Kate Fisher

New Zealand could risk a terrorist attack and tarnish its clean green image if the next government relaxes nuclear-free legislation, warns former Australian intelligence analyst Andrew Wilkie.

He says the risk will be increased by closer security and foreign policy relations with the United States after the election.

Wilkie, author of *Axis of Deceit*, is a former military lieutenant-colonel and intelligence analyst for the Australian Office of National Assessments.

The Labour Party says it will maintain New Zealand's nuclear-free policy.

National's foreign and defence policy says any change to legislation will require a public referendum before New Zealand opens its doors to nuclear-powered ships.

National's spokesperson for defence, John Carter, says defence spending is low – New Zealand spent less than 1 per cent of GDP on defence in 2002 and 2003. Australia spent 1.9 per cent in 2003.

"This leads to justifiable criticism that New Zealand is not pulling its weight in the contri-

bution to international security," says Carter.

He says New Zealand should look to increase defence spending to match Australia.

Wilkie resigned from his assessments office job on the eve of Australia joining the US-led invasion in Iraq. He went public with his claims that John Howard's Government was manipulating and distorting intelligence for political reasons.

Brought over to New Zealand to campaign with the Green Party, Wilkie says it is not just about the threat to this country's nuclear-free policy and whether we should allow nuclear-powered ships into our waters, but also how we are seen to support the United States of America globally.

"Extremists will see US allies in the same light as they see the US, which is why the UK and Australia are the closest targets after the US," he says.

"They react to what we do and who we do it with, much more than who we are."

New Zealand and Australia have close relations but it is important for both countries to maintain independent foreign policies, he says.

Economic and trade policies don't necessarily qualify as

"cosying up", but New Zealand needs to be careful about its foreign defence and security policies.

If New Zealand has a military presence in any country, it will risk being a terrorist target, he says.

"Close military co-operation with the US would be a bad move."

The Government says there are strong economic, political and trade policy reasons to have a free trade agreement with the US.

"Not everything about globalisation is bad – it's in the interest of leaders to have friendly relations with countries for trade," says Wilkie.

Rod Donald of the Green Party says New Zealand's anti-nuclear status could be diluted in an effort to get a free-trade agreement with the US.

Wilkie says talks over the resumption of US naval ship visits to New Zealand could lead to ships containing nuclear weapons or depleted uranium, which is highly volatile.

"No nuclear-propulsion can be considered safe. All such ships are potential targets for terrorist attacks, as happened with the USS Ashland docked in Jordan two weeks ago."

Hamilton's airport an alternative for Auckland

by Fiona Robertson

Aucklanders should forget about developing the Air Force base at Whenuapai into an alternative international airport and concentrate instead on Hamilton's potential, says an Auckland academic.

Keith Rankin, from Unitec's school of accountancy, law and finance, says Hamilton Airport has the potential to develop the same relationship to Auckland International Airport as Gatwick has to Heathrow.

Rankin suggests commuters could link to Hamilton from the Dairy Flat airfield between Albany and Orewa, north of Auckland. This would provide people from the north-eastern Auckland area with an alternative international airport.

He says if budget airlines' feeder flights concentrated more on Hamilton Airport, customers would benefit from increased competition with Auckland International Airport.

"At the moment I think it's under-used as a domestic airport."

But Hugh McCarrroll, chief executive of Waikato Regional Airport Ltd, says he thinks getting North Auckland commuters to use a link to Hamilton Airport would be a "pretty hard ask".

While he says Hamilton Airport is a natural second airport for Auckland and passengers south of Auckland, he says shorter domestic routes such as an Auckland-Hamilton link are difficult for airlines to justify.

"It's very difficult to make money on that."

A direct Dairy Flat-Wellington link would be a stronger possibility, he thinks.

Hamilton Airport already concentrates on attracting

budget airlines to service the regional market and trans-Tasman destinations.

Ewan Wilson, Hamilton city councillor and aviation consultant, says he agrees with Rankin's idea.

He says Hamilton Airport has "huge potential" with growing populations around Auckland and the Waikato.

"The airlines have to be the catalyst."

Don Huse, CEO of Auckland International Airport Ltd, agrees with his Hamilton counterpart that the cost of a trip from Dairy Flat to Hamilton would be prohibitive. Huse also says Hamilton Airport has only limited international flights and that Auckland Airport does not need another regional airport.

"Our position is that instead of developing more airports for a region that is already well-served by Auckland Airport – and will be for the foreseeable future – fix the region's surface transport problems of roads and public transport, so that local passengers and visitors to our country can travel on land as easily as they can in the air."

Sharon Adamson, a Dairy Flat resident, says a link to Hamilton would compensate for the distance to Auckland airport.

"It would be helpful if it ever went ahead."

But Pam Leggett, who lives in the vicinity of the Dairy Flat airstrip, says the airstrip should not be expanded. "It's big enough as it is."

She would support development only if it was limited to use of small planes such as the four and six-seaters currently in use.

Not a regular flyer, she says the trip to Auckland is not a problem for her. "You just make sure you allow plenty of time."

Poll reveals uncertainty among students

by Jonathan Williams

Young voters are undecided on who to vote for just eight days out from the general election.

A poll conducted by second-year AUT journalism students has the major parties neck and neck, each polling at 43 per cent.

The street poll surveyed 189 voters aged between 18 and 24.

It found that students, like other voters, were most concerned with how the new government would hit their pockets.

They identified National's tax cuts and Labour's student loan policies as potential election-winning policies.

Student-focussed policies affect many young voters either directly, or indirectly through friends and family members.

Those polled thought Labour's student loan policy would benefit people who had large student loans and might help stem the flow of intelligent graduates overseas.

Communication Studies student Kate Liddington is positive about Labour's policy.

"It's great. I don't have to pay back four times the amount I've borrowed," she says.

Management student Alex Scott says: "There is less temptation to go overseas for a higher wage, so not everyone will head off for Australia, meaning we keep

good people here."

But there was also scepticism around the credibility of Labour's policy.

Jamie Hughes, a tourism student from Albany, is doubtful Labour will make good on its promises.

"The policy is good in theory but slightly unrealistic. How will it actually work? Where will the money come from? I don't have much faith they will actually deliver," he says.

Commerce student Sarah Campbell slams Labour's policy.

"It's a cheap, pathetic bribe to get votes. It's against what democracy stands for," she says.

Lack of information about National's student loan policy hurt it in the poll.

Claire McAndrew says: "I'm not actually sure what the whole tax rebate thing encompasses."

People identified tax cuts as National's saving grace.

Joanna McCarthy, an arts student, says the cuts plan will appeal to voters who don't benefit from the student loan policies.

"Student loan policies are great but they affect only a relatively small number of people."

"The benefits will really only be felt over the coming years as people graduate," she says.

"Tax cuts will help people now because all people will have a little more money every week."