



## Defence head given ambassador role

By chief political correspondent Simon Cullen

*Updated Mon Sep 17, 2012 4:15pm AEST*

**The head of the Defence Department, Duncan Lewis, is to become Australia's next ambassador to the European Union and NATO, amid reports he was preparing to quit his job over budget cuts.**

Mr Lewis will leave the department next month after just over a year in the job.

Newspaper reports have suggested Mr Lewis was unhappy with government moves to slash billions of dollars from the defence budget.

"As things stand, I don't think we are structured or postured appropriately to meet our likely strategic circumstances in the future," Mr Lewis told a Strategic Policy Institute dinner last month, according to the Financial Review newspaper.

Defence is in the process of writing a new White Paper to be delivered in the first half of next year.

But the department has not been spared in the Government's quest to deliver a budget surplus this financial year.

Foreign Affairs Minister Bob Carr has denied Mr Lewis revealed in a speech last month that he was angry at budget cuts.

"In the speech, he said explicitly that Australia's defence spending was appropriate," Senator Carr said.

"Budget decisions on defence were made in the context of governments around the world, including that of the US and the UK cutting defence spending more than Australia had done."

In Mr Lewis's new role, he will also be Australia's ambassador to Belgium and Luxembourg.

He will be replaced by Dennis Richardson, who is currently the head of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

Peter Varghese, currently Australia's High Commissioner to India, will return to take up the role as secretary of DFAT.

Mr Varghese was previously the director-general of the Office of National Assessments and also a deputy secretary of DFAT.

Australia's current ambassador to Belgium, the European Union, Luxembourg, and NATO, Brendan Nelson, has been appointed as the director of the War Memorial in Canberra.

**Topics:** defence-forces, defence-and-national-security, public-sector, government-and-politics, budget, australia

*First posted Mon Sep 17, 2012 2:43pm AEST*

Contact Simon Cullen