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Minister of Defence



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Speech

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

The last 15 years has seen the international strategic environment become increasingly uncertain and unstable.

If we ever were in a benign strategic environment we most certainly are no longer.

Some of the changes have evolved more gradually, for example the resurgence of a more assertive Russia.

The growing economic might of China and its emergence as a military big power.

And the cause of concern to Russia and China, and the whole of the Asia Pacific region, the volatile and unpredictable North Korea.

But some changes have come in the form of major shocks like the 9/11 terror attacks or the dramatic emergence of Daesh and other sectarian terrorist groups.

New Zealand's concept of security has also evolved.

We can no longer afford to think about our security from a perspective that says our geographic location provides a fortress against would-be invaders.

Indeed those terms, fortress and invaders, are along with most traditional descriptors of threat and deterrent, being redefined by advances in technology.

These advances have brought New Zealand economically and socially closer to the world, and this connectivity also carries increased risks.

Cyber threats are growing markedly both in quantity and variety.

They can emanate from anywhere and target any of us.

We have seen parts of the Ukrainian power grid shut down and 30,000 computers in Saudi Arabia's national oil firm disabled.

Just weeks ago Denial of Service attacks were part of the reason for crashing the Australian Government's online census.

Such events occurring in New Zealand are not inconceivable.

Cyber-attacks, and the need for cyber defences, are now business as usual for many organisations.

New Zealand commerce, social services and government services also rely increasingly on space-based infrastructure, such as satellites.

This infrastructure supports critical communications and navigation functions.

It is the modern oil of economic prosperity, helps maintain public safety and in a defence context supports our military operations.

Nor are we immune from the terror threat.

Extremist groups have shown a sophisticated grasp of technology and social media.

This has enabled them to penetrate communities globally to take advantage of the vulnerable and disaffected.

Terror attacks in other countries pose obvious threats to life and property – and in the case of Daesh have undermined national borders.

This has been borne out with the recent attacks in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Syria, France, Germany, Afghanistan, Turkey, Belgium, the United States, Iraq and Australia in the recent past.

Terror attacks outside of New Zealand can have a direct impact on New Zealanders too.

On any given day there are about 80,000 New Zealanders overseas.

Roughly half a million New Zealand citizens live in the United States, Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom.

So New Zealand has a strong interest in contributing to counter terror efforts overseas.

But I'll say more about this later.

Overall we are seeing increasing challenges to the international rules based order.

We have a strong interest in supporting this order.

This is the reason we sought a seat on the United Nations Security Council.

Examples abound, whether in the Middle East, the Ukraine and Crimea and arguably even closer to home in the South Pacific where transnational crime is undermining the sovereignty of nations whose ability to control their coastlines is already limited.

As a small country we rely on a stable international rules based order.

This provides a level playing field, according the same rights to all states regardless of their size or strategic weight.

It provides a set of rules and institutions that govern state behaviour and maintain a degree of predictability.

Our economic prosperity is intimately linked to security and stability further afield.

New Zealand continues to benefit from the opportunities provided by Asia's strong growth.

Seven of our 10 largest trading partners are in Asia.

We have a strong interest in peace and security in the region.

Regional tensions are greater than they were five years ago, but the likelihood of major conflict in the region remains low due to factors such as today's extensive economic integration.

But our geography will still define our immediate priorities.

You may have seen our Defence White Paper doesn't identify any direct military threat to New Zealand.

But you also know that New Zealand must manage a range of other important strategic challenges.

Many of these challenges relate to our status as a maritime nation.

New Zealand's Exclusive Economic Zone is the fourth largest in the world.

We've got a responsibility to protect the natural resources within this area.

Beyond the Exclusive Economic Zone, New Zealand's area of search and rescue responsibility extends from North of the Equator, all the way to the South Pole, halfway to Australia and half way to South America (one eleventh of the planet).

As our wider maritime zone gets more congested, fulfilling our responsibilities is getting more difficult and complex.

New Zealand has a claim to the Ross Dependency of Antarctica, an area together with the Southern Ocean that is the focus of increasing international interest.

As a nation we've got a strong interest in preserving the Antarctic environment and its stability.

Like our South Pacific partners we face a constant threat of natural disasters.

New Zealand's security is connected with that of our friends and partners in the South Pacific.

Our strong people-to-people links, historical connections and in some cases constitutional obligations mean we have a strong interest in supporting regional stability.

New Zealand's role in supporting Fiji in the aftermath of Cyclone Winston is one of many tangible examples of this.

In April of this year the New Zealand Defence Force completed its post Winston relief operations in Fiji.

This operation was one of our biggest peacetime deployments to the Pacific, with close to 500 personnel, two ships and six aircraft, involved in delivering hundreds of tonnes of critical aid.

Beyond their vulnerability to natural disasters, our South Pacific neighbours also face many social, economic and governance pressures.

New Zealand preparedness to support its neighbours in the South Pacific, either independently or alongside its partners, will remain a priority.

Security is an all-of-government issue.

New Zealand, and by extension its defence force, must be ready to meet a wide range of security challenges.

Security is not the responsibility of core security agencies alone.

Cyber security, for example, requires a national effort.

To help defend government and critical infrastructure the National Cyber Security Centre watches for high-end threats.

The national Computer Emergency Response Team supports business and private citizens by providing advice on managing cyber security incidents and cybercrime.

But to do its job it also relies upon the vigilance of those citizens and their willingness to report such incidents.

In the case of Defence, this is about working alongside a range of other agencies, for example to protect resources in our Exclusive Economic Zone.

Given their potential impact on New Zealand's economic and security interests, we have an enduring interest in responding to challenges far from our shores.

New Zealand has always taken a global perspective to global security.

We have a history of contributing to international efforts to resolve conflict.

We are longstanding contributors to two missions which are helping to preserve peace in the Middle East – the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation – since 1954 – and the Multinational Force and Observers in the Sinai since 1982.

We also contribute to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan and in South Korea as part of the United Nations Military Armistice Commission.

We expect to see an increasing number of requests for support of this nature.

Our commitment to the international rules-based order means we will carefully consider each request.

This will involve weighing our international commitments and objectives, and our requirements closer to home.

We know, too, that in many of these environments, the threat levels are no different to those in more traditional inter-state conflicts.

The risk to New Zealand lives is therefore a critical component of these deployment decisions.

But no deployment beyond our immediate region will be undertaken alone.

This brings me to my next point.

New Zealand, and Defence in particular, now places a greater emphasis on the importance of partnerships, and our ability to work with our partners.

Australia

As our closest partner and ally, we'll continue to cooperate with Australia on range of security issues.

Beyond our longstanding cooperation to support security and stability in the South Pacific, New Zealand is also committed to working with Australia much further afield.

Last year we deployed up to 143 New Zealand Defence Force personnel, alongside Australia, to the Building Partner Capacity mission in Taji.

New Zealand personnel are in Iraq providing essential skills training to the Iraqi Security Forces to support them in their fight against Daesh.

The deployment has been a success, with the Taji mission training over 7000 Iraqi soldiers to date.

The government recently decided to extend our commitment there until November 2018.

We have a small number of officers based at Coalition headquarters in Baghdad as part of Operation Inherent Resolve, and those officers are held in high regard.

This has been most recently illustrated by the appointment from November this year of a New Zealand Army Brigadier to the role of Deputy Commanding General of the Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command, which is a great honour for him and the Defence Force.

United States

New Zealand's relationship with the United States is based on deep historical ties.

We have a long record of cooperation on security issues.

Our relationship which dates back almost 180 years has seen us work together in two World Wars and in all the major conflicts in between and thereafter.

I recently visited Washington DC where I attended Defence and Foreign Ministers' Counter-ISIL meetings chaired by US Secretary of Defense, Ash Carter and Secretary of State, John Kerry.

I also went on to Honolulu to meet with Admiral Harry Harris, Commander United States Pacific Command.

While there I was able to spend time with New Zealand Defence Force personnel participating in the international maritime exercise, Rim of the Pacific.

This is the world's largest maritime exercise and is an enormously valuable opportunity for New Zealand Defence Force personnel.

It is one of a huge number of exercises and training opportunities that has opened up to us as our relationship with the United States has deepened.

We were re-invited to RIMPAC in 2010 as an observer and our participation was upgraded to a full participant in 2012.

The signatures of the Wellington Declaration in 2010 and Washington Declaration in 2012 have accelerated the security and defence relationship.

Defence cooperation with the US had become closer in part because of our shared experience in Afghanistan – a country where we both still deploy troops.

While the Afghan people and their national security forces have made great progress fighting the Taliban, continued support to the security forces is essential to preserve the investment of the past 15 years.

The government has recently made a decision to extend our commitment of trainers to the Afghan National Army Officer Academy to June 2018, and increase the number of personnel.

The Wellington Declaration committed us to a strategic partnership to shape future practical cooperation and political dialogue.

This was followed up in 2012 when we signed the Washington Declaration which set out a framework and vision to expand practical bilateral defence cooperation.

Early on in my tenure as Minister of Defence, I met with then-Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel.

I delivered him a letter of invitation from the Chief of Navy to the Royal New Zealand Navy's 75th anniversary.

Like the Prime Minister, I welcome the United States acceptance of that invitation and their decision to have a ship represent the US Navy at this event.

While there is a process to play out, I am pleased the US is taking up this invitation.

UK

Like our relationship with the US, our links with the United Kingdom are among our most important and enduring.

They are underpinned by common values and interests.

Our close military-to-military links with the UK are built on a strong operational history.

The UK is also a contemporary defence partner of choice for New Zealand.

New Zealand Defence Force personnel are currently deployed alongside the UK at the Afghan National Army Officer Academy.

New Zealand also partners with the UK in specialist training and capability development.

China

China is pivotal to security in the Asia-Pacific.

The region stands to benefit from a prosperous and peaceful China, which is engaged in international systems as an active and positive participant.

New Zealand will therefore continue to develop its security relationship with China, which has built significant momentum in recent years.

People's Liberation Army engineers participated alongside New Zealand and the United States in the New Zealand-led Humanitarian and Disaster Relief Exercise Tropic Twilight in Tonga last month.

Chinese officers also participated alongside representatives from the New Zealand Defence Force, the Australian Defence Force and the United States Military in the humanitarian and disaster relief Exercise Cooperation Spirit held in Wellington earlier this month.

Further afield, we welcome China's extensive peacekeeping contributions, and in particular the force protection it has provided to New Zealand troops as part of the United Nations peacekeeping efforts in South Sudan.

Despite relative differences in our strategic outlook and in the sizes of our two Defence Forces, New Zealand and China are developing a constructive and resilient relationship.

Our interactions with the People's Liberation Army allow for real issues to be discussed openly.

And there are challenging issues to navigate.

In October 2015 I travelled to China and had in-depth discussions with a range of military leaders, including General Fan Changlong, Vice-Chairman of the Central Military Commission.

In terms of his position in the Chinese hierarchy he's similarly placed to our CDF, Lieutenant General Tim Keating, but with a standing army of 1 million 987 thousand more troops than Tim, and another 4 million reserves.

One of the things we discussed was China's history of doing big things in an engineering sense, notably the Great Wall.

We also discussed the – at the time – reclamation of 2500 hectares in the South China Sea in less than 18 months.

It would be a considerably greater area now, and General Fan accepted the scale of all this was bound to cause some excitement.

Another word for it is tension, which these developments continue to cause.

New Zealand's position on the issue – and on the recent Arbitration Tribunal ruling – has been consistent.

While we take no position on the various claims in the South China Sea, New Zealand opposes actions that undermine peace and erode trust.

We support the right of states to access dispute settlement mechanisms in managing complex issues.

We also support their right to have the outcomes of such processes respected.

At the heart of the matter is two big powers with big responsibilities.

With the arbitral process now concluded, we hope that the parties can use it as a basis to work together to resolve their differences.

But we are also realistic.

This issue will continue to test the international legal system.

Continued China-United States engagement and cooperation is indispensable to security and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

And we are optimistic about the continuing military engagement by both countries.

President Xi visited the United States last year, and has invited Defense Secretary Ash Carter to visit Beijing later this year.

In recent times both Commander Pacific Command and the US Chief of Navy equivalent have visited China.

New Zealand is acutely aware of the dynamic between China and the United States, but we do not see our defence relationships as mutually exclusive.

Multilateral

Beyond our bilateral relationships, we work actively with a range of regional and international fora.

We'll continue to develop defence links not only through the United Nations, but through groups such as the Association of South East Asian Nations Regional Forum and Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus, and the Five Power Defence Arrangements.

So working closely with our international partners is a critical component of the Defence response to the strategic challenges New Zealand faces.

This brings me to my final point.

The challenges we face are diverse and complex.

They have changed considerably in a short period of time, and will continue to do so.

Advancing our national interests will become harder, not easier in the decades to come.

But none of this absolves us of taking responsibility for doing what we can to understand and respond to this environment.

The Defence White Paper launched by the Government on 8 June signalled a strong commitment by the Government to maintaining a well-equipped and responsive defence force that can respond to a range of likely security challenges in the future.

This poses a particular challenge for Defence.

We need to make big investment decisions which will determine what our defence force will look like in the decades to come.

The Government's recent decision to replace HMNZS *Endeavour* with an ice-strengthened tanker is an example of this.

This decision recognises that our security environment is continually evolving, and will require different responses from the Defence Force in the future.

Also in line with the White Paper I have just this week announced the signing of a \$36 million contract with Boeing to upgrade the Air Force's Underwater Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance capability on the six Orions, and given approval for tenders to go out for a new naval ship to support Littoral Operations.

To ensure we make the best decisions possible and that we are building the best defence force to meet our security needs in the future, this Government is committed to a regular cycle of Defence White Papers.

This will allow us to continually re-assess how our environment is evolving.

This will enable us to determine the right mix of defence capability needed in the future, ensure that we will have appropriate capabilities to work with our partners, and that we are spending the right amount.

As a final word, I want to acknowledge the real contribution of the men and women of the New Zealand Defence Force.

Both at home and overseas, they are asked to undertake challenging and sometimes dangerous tasks to advance our national security objectives.

It is behoves our Government, and the Defence Force, to ensure that our personnel receive the best training and equipment.

That, along with the dedication of the men and women of the Defence Force, helps immensely in the furtherance of our security and defence objectives.

We all owe them a debt of thanks.