

SecDef speech to NZIIP conference, 13 October 2022

Conference theme: Established and Evolving Voices in Intelligence / Kaitiakitanga a

Auahatanga I roto Whakakitenga

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Introduction

[Personal greeting]

Thank you for the invitation to speak to you all today. It's a real privilege to be here to support you in exploring how to ensure intelligence practice in New Zealand both draws from established tradecraft practices and encourages new voices and approaches.

It will be no secret to you that we are living through increasingly challenging times. It is a brave person who tries to predict with any level of certainty what the world, or even our own region, will look like into the future. But what New Zealand needs from its intelligence practitioners – from you – is to reduce that uncertainty. To better understand the threats, challenges and opportunities. To help illuminate the space available to decision-makers to better shape and navigate our world.

And that will require an increasing range of approaches and voices, to build on the carefully crafted practices to which you all have contributed.

In any field of human endeavour, I think it is important to understand the nature of the beast. What are the rules? What are the parameters? What is the rough ball park in which you are playing?

If you understand the broad parameters you can operate with a certain, but not total, sense of predictability. I have taken this approach to every field in which I have worked in the public service: health, Treaty settlements, business policy, IT innovations and Justice.

In each there has been a certain aspect of predictability, or at least known unpredictability. There are behaviours that you will expect, because there are known drivers of people's behaviour.

Unfortunately – as I have found out – none of this applies to the field of conflict. Defence policy is without doubt the most complex and elusive area of public policy in which I have worked.

This complexity is at two levels. One, the paradox, and two the absence of certainty and predictability.

The paradox of conflict is best described by Laurence Freedman in his book, *The Future of War – A History*. John F. Kennedy summarised this paradox most succinctly when he said, “It is an unfortunate fact we can secure peace only by preparing for war”.

The absence of certainty and predictability was also summed up by Hugh White in his book, *How To Defend Australia*, “war remains one of the most puzzling and unpredictable aspects of human behaviour”. He goes on to say – and this is the policy wonk’s dilemma:

“There are few hard facts to work with, so we must rely on judgements about things that are at best uncertain and sometimes quite unknowable”.

This is true, but it means the margin for error is huge. I’d note Lawrence Freedman’s observation that decision makers routinely underestimate how long and how bloody conflicts will be, and how hard they are to get out of.

And finally, if I have not already disconnected you, an observation from Major Gerard Bob Scoles, a retired commander at the US Army War College.

“The least successful enterprise in Washington DC was the one that places bets on the nature and character of tomorrow’s wars. It was a vast enterprise involving the services, defence industries, their supporting think tanks, along with congress, academia and the media. Yet the success rate was poor – virtually without exception they got it wrong.”

I give you these insights not because assessing the challenges of the future is an impossible task, but it is an incredibly difficult task that must, given the variables, be undertaken with a calculated set of dispassionate analytical tools and a huge dose of humility.

As Sir Michael Howard stated:

“No matter how clearly one thinks, it is impossible to anticipate precisely the character of future conflict. The key is not to be so far off the mark that it becomes impossible to adjust once that character is revealed”.

With that all as context, what I'd like to provide you with today are:

- First, a perspective on the strategic environment we are facing;
- Second, an overview of how we are approaching defence policy in relation to that environment;
- Third, a description of what we are doing at the Ministry of Defence to enable both established and evolving voices in defence policy;
- And finally, some challenges and opportunities for you all

New Zealand's strategic environment

In December last year, with the Minister of Defence, I publicly released our *Defence Assessment 2021: He moana pukepuke e ekengia e te waka: a rough sea can still be navigated*. At the risk of repeating what you already know, given I am confident you have all read it, the Assessment described a substantially more challenging and complex strategic environment for New Zealand than for decades.

As prime ministers are apt to do, earlier this year the Prime Minister gave a rather more pithy summation of what we found: "it's grim out there".

Our Assessment described the two principal challenges facing New Zealand's national security as arising from strategic competition and climate change. And these are layering on top of a range of other existing and novel challenges.

These threats are being expressed globally, but are being felt in our immediate neighbourhood in ways that challenge many of our fundamental assumptions about our security.

And these impacts have direct and indirect implications for our security here at home.

Developments over the past year suggest the Assessment's description of our strategic environment remains broadly correct, but that the world is changing even more rapidly than we had anticipated. Among the more significant of these development, I would include:

- Russia's invasion of Ukraine
- Ever increasing tensions across the Taiwan Strait, as part of a broader picture of growing competition in Asia
- And the signing of the Solomon Islands-China security cooperation agreement.

Intelligence has played an important role in helping us to understand New Zealand's strategic environment, both the overall trends and more discrete developments.

I would also observe that intelligence has increasingly been playing a more active and public role internationally as a tool of statecraft to shape security outcomes. The daily intelligence briefings being released by the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence on developments in Ukraine are just one example.

This is a useful example of established tools of statecraft being used in new ways in response to a changing world.

The role of defence policy in this more challenging strategic environment

So, what are we doing as the Ministry of Defence, in terms of providing policy analysis and advice to Government, to respond to this more challenging strategic environment?

Before I get to that, I thought it would be useful to give you something of an overview of our role in more general terms.

At a very high level, our role is to consider how defence tools – including military force – can best be used to protect and promote New Zealand’s national security interests.

As a Ministry, our vision is that we are “Thought Leaders strengthening national security in an uncertain world”.

Part of that involves supporting the Minister of Defence and Government more generally to exercise civilian oversight of the military, but more importantly it involves working with the Defence Force to provide coherent advice that integrates both civilian and military perspectives.

By working together, the Ministry of Defence and Defence Force can combine our distinct perspectives – our diverse voices – to provide best advice, as a whole-of-Defence enterprise, and as part of the overall national security sector.

We have many analytical frameworks that we apply in the course of our work, for different applications, and for widely varying timescales.

For immediate responses to security events, and for defence deployments more generally, with the Defence Force we often apply a “could we, should we, will we” framework.

For more strategic defence policy issues, we use a policy, strategy, capability and resourcing framework.

And for our capability projects, we have a rigorous capability management system that enables robust programme and project management. I’m sure you can appreciate how important such mechanisms are when the costs run into the billions of dollars.

These frameworks have enabled us to support Government to make rapid decisions on military support to Ukraine, to manage the years-long frigate update programme, and are now being used to progress our Defence Policy Review process.

Following the findings of *Defence Assessment 2021*, a key element of this Defence Policy Review process is taking a more proactive, more deliberate, and more strategy-led approach to New Zealand’s defence policy settings.

For decades, our defence policy has largely been framed around being ready to respond to events as they arise. With less emphasis on pro-actively using defence tools to shape our environment to promote our national security interests.

That approach was appropriate for the more benign world that we enjoyed over previous decades, but will not best serve New Zealand's interests today and into the future.

Today, alongside the Defence Force and other agencies in the national security sector, we are working to identify how Defence tools can be used more proactively to build resilience at home and in our region, to prevent and deter threats, and to promote New Zealand's interests and values.

To develop this new defence policy approach requires both deep expertise on a range of issues, and new ideas and perspectives that can – at times – be uncomfortable for our system. We need both established and emerging voices to contribute together.

The Ministry Of Defence's work to support diverse voices

Within the Ministry we are building diverse voices through our commitment to Diversity and Inclusion.

While we have been tasked to do this by the Public Service Commission and the Public Service Act 2020, I am committed to this work [REDACTED] s9(2)(g)(i)

Supporting diversity and inclusion is the number one thing in the Ministry of Defence's People Strategy, because that's where I asked it to be.

Everyone in the Ministry has a part to play to enable our People Strategy – not just people managers.

We all need to take care to include the people in our teams and think about what that looks like.

We all need to confront our own biases.

We all need to be mindful that we are not all the same – so we need to treat all our people with grace – and our staff are strongly encouraged to participate in Unconscious Bias training and/or the Cultural Intelligence training. The Ministry has workshops on this but I know the intelligence community has developed some excellent and engaging online learning tools.

These things help create an inclusive environment. When people feel included we know they are going to feel more comfortable sharing their ideas. We need their ideas and perspectives.

If we don't each do our bit to create an inclusive place to work, then we won't keep that diversity of thought and we won't be doing our best by New Zealand.

As part of creating an inclusive environment, we are nurturing our Employee-Led Networks. I am always supportive when people come to me for advice and support. After the lockdowns our young professionals asked for time with Senior Leadership to help us understand the world from their viewpoint. Of course we were delighted and the discussion was insightful for us all. Recently our Pride Network asked me to be their Executive champion. I was chuffed, and I made sure I had the time to attend their hui even though I had one foot on the plane to head out to the Solomon Islands on an unexpected trip.

Our Senior Leadership Team is committed to building diverse teams across the organisation.

We know that means doing things differently to what we have always done. We know it means being deliberate in our processes, asking questions and not being afraid to challenge when process looks like it is not delivering the diversity we know we need to deliver innovation and better diversity of thought. Like any recruiting manager I will ask for the

recruitment plans to give me a level of comfort that as a Ministry we are looking for people from different walks of life and not targeting the same pool.

And data. My team will tell you how much I like to see the data. This is one way that I know we are progressing. Ultimately I will see diversity of thought in our solutions, in the advice that we provide the Minister, in how we deliver Capability to and with the NZDF, but in the meantime, I know we are on track by asking for the data.

Challenges and opportunities for the intelligence community

That is what we are doing in the Ministry of Defence to support and encourage greater diversity of perspective, to ensure we are working to be best placed to support New Zealand's security and wellbeing today and into the future.

The question I would ask, then, is what can the intelligence community do support emerging voices as well as draw from the best of existing practices.

In many respects the challenges and opportunities for national security policy agencies and for intelligence functions are the same. While our particular functions differ, we are largely working the same problems, and are recruiting from the same talent pool. And we all need

to be sufficiently self-reflective to understand those aspects of our existing practices that we need to retain, and what we need to do differently.

That applies at the overall system level, at the function level, and even down to us as individuals.

Perhaps the most important challenge – and opportunity – for us is to make our workforces reflect New Zealand today. We know that we struggle to recruit and retain staff from some key parts of our population, and that these would be people that could bring real understanding of key national security issues for us today.

We need to work to understand why this is the case, whether because of process challenges – like security clearances – or because we are not making ourselves sufficiently attractive and welcoming.

I think it's fair to say that national security and intelligence does not feature as strongly as it might as a potential career for many in Māori and Pasifika communities, for example.

There are opportunities for the national security sector as a whole to work collectively to change these perceptions, and we are trying to do that. There is a group that meets

regularly, drawn from agencies across the sector, that is seeking to address this challenge.

It is slow going but headway is being made.

But these more focussed efforts are not enough. We all need to contribute.

I would note that one of the Ministry of Defence's four focus areas is to "Engage New Zealanders on Defence". We are doing this partly because it is important that New Zealanders understand the work we do on their behalf, partly because it is important that New Zealanders can contribute to defence policy decision making, and also because we want to broaden the span of New Zealanders that might consider a career in Defence.

For you and your agencies then, I would challenge you to think about how you can better reach out and engage, and how best we can draw from all parts of our population to be a part of the work we are doing.

Thank you for your time.

I would be glad to take any questions.