

11 April 2023

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Tēnā koe Adam Irish

I refer to your email of 13 February 2023 to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) in which you request the following under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA):

1. *What steps are being taken to enhance the country's defense capabilities in light of current global security threats?*
2. *How does the government plan to address the potential threat of conflict with the People's Republic of China and maintain regional stability?*
3. *What is the current defense budget as a percentage of GDP and how does this compare to the recommended 2% for NATO partners?*
4. *What measures are being taken to modernize and update the country's military equipment and technology?*
5. *How does the government plan to enhance the readiness and training of New Zealand's military personnel?*
6. ***What is the government's position on New Zealand's ANZUS treaty obligations and how does it plan to address these commitments in the event of a conflict?***
7. ***How is the government working with international partners to enhance regional security and promote peace and stability?***
8. *What is the government's strategy for addressing the threat of cyber attacks and ensuring the country's critical infrastructure is protected?*

On 23 February 2023, you were informed that a portion of your request, namely questions 6 and 7, were transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (the Ministry) for response. This transfer was received by the Ministry on 3 March 2023.

On 31 March 2023, you were informed the deadline to provide a decision on your request was extended to 18 April 2023. Thank you for your patience.

In response to item 6 of your request, New Zealand takes its international treaty obligations seriously, including those set out in the Australia, New Zealand and the United States Security

Treaty (ANZUS Treaty). Although the ANZUS Treaty security obligations between New Zealand and the US have been suspended for some time, the New Zealand Government remains fully committed to its ANZUS obligations with respect to Australia. Any responses to security issues in our region would reflect this.

The Ministry is not required to respond to hypothetical questions or create new information under the OIA. Therefore we have not responded to the second part of question 6 “...how does it plan to address these commitments in the event of a conflict?”

In response to question 7 of your request, New Zealand works with a range of international partners to enhance regional security and promote peace and stability, both in our region of the Pacific and in our wider Indo-Pacific home region.

In the Pacific, New Zealand has a strong commitment to supporting our region’s security, as set out in the Pacific Islands Forum *Biketawa* and *Boe* Declarations. Where security issues arise in our region, Pacific Islands Forum Leaders have emphasised a “family first” approach to security, in line with the principle that the Pacific has the collective capacity and commitment to meet its own security needs. New Zealand has been clear with all of our partners that it is important that engagement in our region takes place in a manner which advances Pacific priorities and is consistent with established regional practices.

In the wider Indo-Pacific, regional security issues also require a regional response. That is why we work to address common security challenges together through our long-standing membership of relevant Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) mechanisms such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF), and the East Asia Summit (EAS). Through our bilateral Programme of Action with ASEAN, as well as cooperation programmes with individual countries, we fund capacity-building programmes with ASEAN Member States in areas such as maritime security, combatting transnational organised crime, combatting people smuggling, and in defence policy.

Through these engagements, we seek to bolster ASEAN’s central role in the region on the basis that ASEAN centrality is core to a peaceful, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific, and a bulwark against increasing geostrategic tensions. Through our attendance at ASEAN forums, particularly the EAS, we directly call out behaviours in the region that run counter to the international rules-based order on which all states rely.

The ADMM-Plus and ARF have specific regional security mandates. The ADMM-Plus aims to strengthen security and defence cooperation amongst its members for peace, stability and development in the region. The ADMM-Plus currently focuses on seven areas of practical cooperation: maritime security, counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, peacekeeping operations, military medicine, humanitarian mine action, and cyber security. The ARF focuses on fostering constructive dialogue on political and security issues and building cooperative ties in the region.

In addition to the ASEAN-centred engagements, New Zealand is committed to working alongside partners in multilateral institutions, particularly the United Nations (UN), to uphold the international rules-based order in support of regional peace and stability. This has included, for example, New Zealand transits of the South China Sea in support of freedom of navigation and overflight as guaranteed under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and the submission of a diplomatic note to the UN Secretary-General in 2021 putting on record

New Zealand's legal position on how UNCLOS applies in the South China Sea. The New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) also deploys 12 personnel to the United Nations Command in the Republic of Korea. This is a multinational body established in 1950 to support peace and security on the Korean Peninsula.

Section 1.3.4 of the Ministry of Defence's Defence Assessment 2021 includes further information on New Zealand's network of international defence and security partners. The Assessment is available on the Ministry of Defence's website at the following link:

<https://www.defence.govt.nz/assets/publication/file/Defence-Assessment-2021.pdf>

Please note that we may publish this letter (with your personal details redacted) on the Ministry's website.

If you have any questions about this decision, you can contact us by email at: [DM-ESD@mfat.govt.nz](mailto:DM-ESD@mfat.govt.nz). You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision by contacting [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or freephone 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SC', written in a cursive style.

Sarah Corbett  
for Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade