



# Defence Policy and Strategy Statement 2023



**Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa**  
New Zealand Government



IMAGE: Around 5000 people attended the New Zealand service held at Churuk Bair in 2023 to honour one of the bloodiest battles of the Gallipoli campaign.

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**HON Andrew Little**  
Minister of Defence

IMAGE: Defence Minister Andrew Little at the Recruit Regular Force 410 Graduation Parade in Waiouru.

# Kupu Takamua a te Minita / Foreword from the Minister

*Defence Assessment 2021: He moana pukepuke e ekengia e te waka* illustrated in stark terms how New Zealand's security environment has deteriorated. But this whakatauki, 'a rough sea can still be navigated', is important in reminding us that even in difficult times we can act to find our way through.

This Government has therefore commissioned a Defence Policy Review to update New Zealand's defence policy to respond to our security environment. This Statement is the first part of that Review, and describes how the protection of New Zealand's defence interests needs to be pursued through a more deliberate and purposeful approach to shaping our security environment, focusing in particular on security in and for the Pacific.

New Zealand's values and character shape how this strategy is defined, reflecting both the principles we uphold in our foreign policy and in our Treaty of Waitangi / Tiriti o Waitangi obligations. Our strategy builds on New Zealand Defence's professionalism as well as a uniquely New Zealand relationship with the world. This is expressed in New Zealand's Defence Principles:

## Angitu

(success, effort, striving) refers to continually striving for success and, in the defence context, security. In practical terms, it translates to Defence being a combat capable, ready force that protects New Zealanders and our interests.

## Kotahitanga

(unity, togetherness, solidarity, collective action) refers to New Zealand's preference for unity of purpose and combined approach to defence issues, both domestically and internationally. Kotahitanga especially characterises how Defence engages with the Pacific region, reflecting our close kinship / whanaungatanga.

## Mana and Pono

(influence, prestige, authority; to be true, valid, honest, sincere) are linked principles encompassing sincerity of action that generates respect and influence. For Defence, this means acting with integrity to build and maintain transparency and accountability.

## Kaitiakitanga

(guardianship, stewardship, trust) refers to the importance of safeguarding the intergenerational wellbeing of communities. Kaitiakitanga also refers to protection of taonga. As a kaitiaki / guardian of local and regional communities, Defence must adopt and promote environmentally sustainable practices, as well as ensure its key capabilities are well-maintained.

This strategy takes into account New Zealand's broader Government policy and strategy settings.

This Statement does not in itself address capability investment questions or require particular investment tracks to be adopted. The *Defence Policy and Strategy Statement* includes a range of defence activities which can be delivered in various combinations of scalable defence capabilities, from defence diplomacy through to combat operations. The task of examining how to best match capabilities to these activities, and balancing the required resourcing with associated trade-offs on policy outcomes, is the subject of a future capability planning process.

The next part of the Defence Policy Review is the development of a set of *Future Force Design Principles* to guide that planning. This work will articulate Government's direction to Defence officials for the development of a range of options for the Defence Force to deliver on policy. This will take the policy and strategy actions and generate planning assumptions and principles to enable Defence Force design to be undertaken.

The *Future Force Design Principles* will consider the challenges that need to be addressed to generate a future force. For instance, like many of our international partners, Defence will face personnel constraints driven by labour shortages. Other challenges to be addressed include keeping pace with and leveraging technological developments; moving to a digital environment; operating in multi-domain environments; facing increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous threats; and ensuring supply chain resilience.

Once decisions are taken on the parameters for generating future capabilities, Government will select options for our future Defence Force structure. This will then form the basis of a Defence Capability Plan, which will shape a number of investment decisions. These options and decisions will need to take into account the full range of enabling functions of capabilities, including personnel, estate, and infrastructure.

Our strategy builds on New Zealand Defence's professionalism as well as a uniquely New Zealand relationship with the world.

IMAGE: A New Zealand Army medic teaches a Ukrainian soldier to dress a wound during a combat lifesaving phase of training during Operation Treke.



**Defence will act early and deliberately to shape our security environment, focusing in particular on supporting security in and for the Pacific.**

IMAGE: An overhead view of HMNZS Aotearoa alongside in Nuku'alofa, ready to unload supplies and water.



# Whakarāpopototanga Matua / Executive Summary

1. New Zealand is facing a more challenging strategic environment than it has for decades. This *Defence Policy and Strategy Statement* articulates the Government's updated defence policy and strategy approach to respond to this environment. This Statement provides guidance to Defence – the Ministry of Defence and the New Zealand Defence Force – for the purposes of planning, operations, engagements with international partners, and investment.
2. This Statement builds on *Defence Assessment 2021: he moana pukepuke e ekengia e te waka*, which identified two significant and compounding challenges with the greatest impact on New Zealand's defence interests over the medium-to-long term: strategic competition and the impacts of climate change. New Zealand is already experiencing the impacts of climate change sharply and deeply, as are our Pacific<sup>1</sup> neighbours. Likewise, whilst strategic competition is playing out globally, it is being seen and felt much closer to New Zealand.
3. The primary goal of this defence policy document is to contribute to the promotion and protection of four key interests:
  - a secure, sovereign, and resilient New Zealand;
  - a secure, stable, and resilient region;
  - collective security through a strong network of partners; and
  - a strong and effective international rules-based system.<sup>2</sup>

These four interests are interconnected, and must all be protected and promoted to ensure New Zealand's security.
4. Defence will act early and deliberately to shape our security environment, focusing in particular on supporting security in and for the Pacific. This proactive approach means that the weight of our Defence effort needs to shift to more actively shaping New Zealand's security environment in order to prevent conflict and activities that threaten our interests.
5. This focus on the Pacific reflects the importance of our immediate neighbourhood to New Zealand's security, and the relationships and obligations we have in the region. The Pacific is also where New Zealand can often have the greatest material impact: Pacific stability, security and resilience are connected to, and directly impact, our own security.
6. This policy approach will be achieved through acting proactively and credibly to deliver three objectives:
  - promoting and protecting New Zealand's defence interests in our region, particularly in the Pacific;
  - contributing globally to collective security efforts that promote and protect New Zealand's interests and values; and
  - responding to events in New Zealand, in our region, and globally where required.
7. The strategy to promote and protect our interests in a more proactive, purposeful, and deliberate way is expressed through three interrelated themes:
 

**Understand** – Defence has increased awareness of strategic and operating environments;

**Partner** – Defence improves and enhances its partnerships within and beyond New Zealand to support collective security approaches to shared challenges, and maximise interoperability with security partners; and

**Act** – Defence is more ready and able to promote and protect New Zealand's interests by shaping our security environment with a credible, combat-capable, deployable force able to operate across the spectrum of operations (from humanitarian assistance through to combat).

These themes encompass what New Zealand can do to be more deliberate and purposeful globally and, particularly, in the Pacific.

<sup>1</sup> In this Statement, 'the Pacific' refers to the south-west Pacific region.

<sup>2</sup> The Statement focuses primarily on New Zealand's *defence* interests; a subset of our broader *national security interests* which Defence has a key role in protecting.

# DEFENCE POLICY AND STRATEGY STATEMENT

OUR DEFENCE GOALS AND HOW WE WILL SEEK TO ACHIEVE THEM

## The threats

## A deteriorating strategic environment

New Zealand is facing a more challenging strategic environment than we have seen in decades, driven by **strategic competition** and the **impacts of climate change**. A range of other drivers are intersecting with these threats.

## Our defence interests

## Is increasing

A secure, sovereign, and resilient New Zealand

A stable, secure, and resilient region

## Our policy objective

## We will act early and deliberately to protect our defence interests, particularly in the Pacific region

- 1 Protecting and promoting New Zealand's defence interests
- 2 Contributing globally to collective security efforts that support our interests
- 3 Responding to events in New Zealand, our region and the Pacific

## Our defence strategy

### Understand

Defence will have increased awareness of our strategic and operating environments by maximising the use of defence capabilities and technologies.

- Expanding awareness of our territory and region
- Contributing to the development of situational awareness with Pacific partners
- Deepening our understanding of our region's security needs and amplifying Pacific voices

### Partner

Defence will improve our security through partnerships with our allies and partners to support collective security and address shared challenges with security partners.

- Collaborating with our allies and partners on security challenges
- Maximising opportunities for joint operations
- Interoperability and joint security partnerships
- Partnering in the Pacific region

## Strategic environment...

...have for decades, with two principal challenges:  
**Climate change.**



## ...mitigating the risk to:

**Collective security through a strong network of partners**

**A strong and effective international rules-based system**

## ...being more actively in pursuing and protecting our interests, particularly in and for the Pacific by:

...interests in our region\*, particularly in the Pacific  
 ...protect and promote New Zealand's interests and values  
 ...globally where required

...improve and enhance our capabilities within and beyond New Zealand  
 ...collective security approaches to our challenges, and maximise interoperability with our partners.

...work more to address shared challenges  
 ...opportunities with Australia  
 ...cooperation and engagement with our partners  
 ...in the Pacific

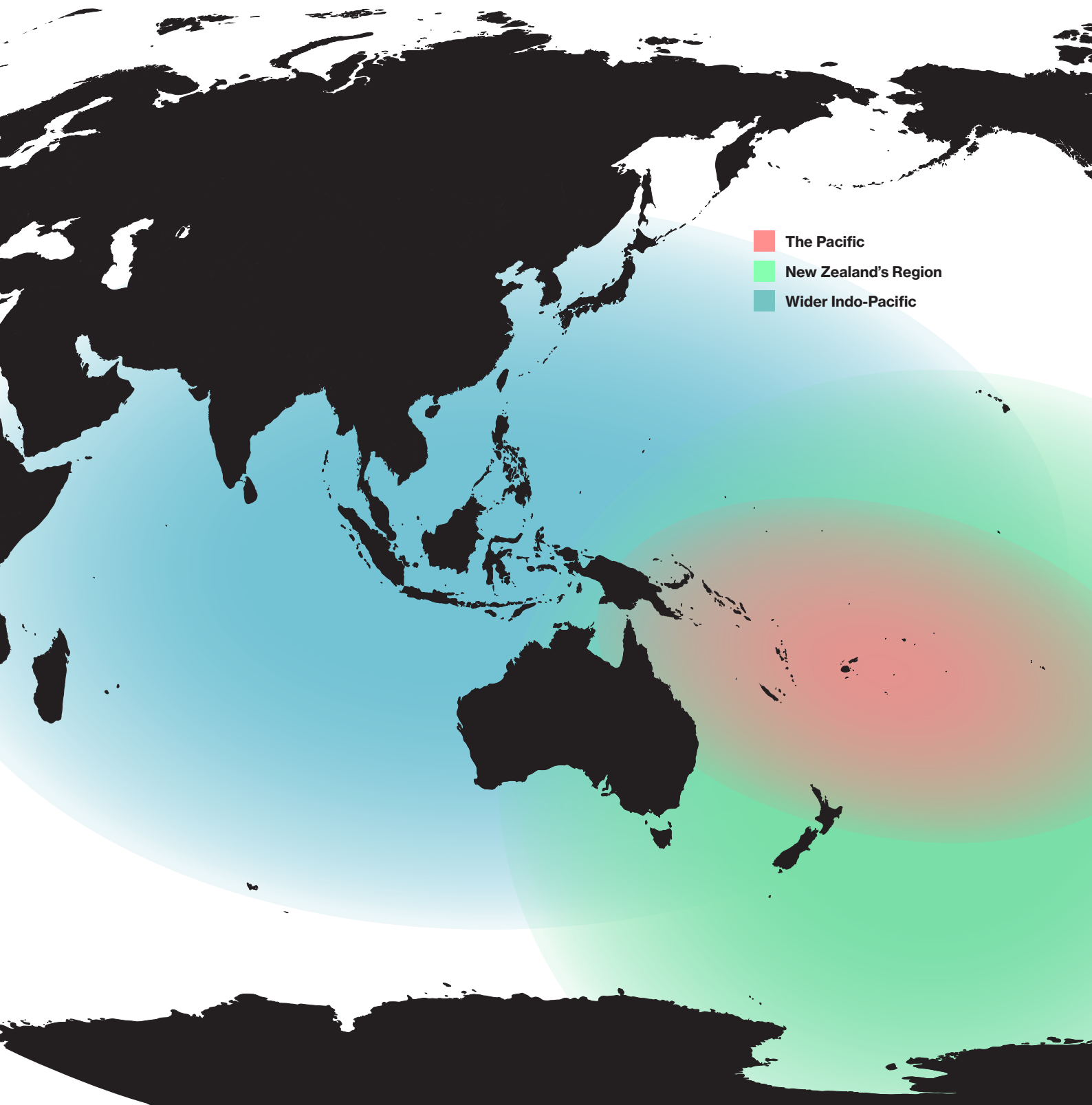
## Act

Defence is more ready and able to promote and protect New Zealand's interests by shaping our security environment with a credible, combat-capable, deployable force able to operate across the spectrum of operations (from humanitarian assistance through to combat).

- Improving the effectiveness of our combat and other military capabilities
- Increasing our presence and strengthening defence resilience and security capacity in the Pacific
- Responding to security events in our region, including Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) activities, and Stability and Support Operations (SASO)
- Preventing actions counter to New Zealand's interests

\* New Zealand's region encompasses the area from Antarctica and the Southern Ocean, through the Pacific, west towards Australia and north-west toward South-East Asia.

**New Zealand is facing a more challenging strategic environment than for decades, with increasing threats to our security.**



- The Pacific
- New Zealand's Region
- Wider Indo-Pacific

# Te Taiao ā-Rautaki o Aotearoa / Part One: New Zealand's Strategic Environment

## Defining Geographies

**New Zealand's territory** includes our territorial sea. New Zealand's maritime domain also encompasses our contiguous zone, exclusive economic zone, and continental shelf. New Zealand maintains a right of sovereignty over the Ross Dependency in Antarctica.

New Zealand has constitutional responsibilities to Tokelau as a non-self-governing territory of New Zealand, and to Cook Islands and Niue as self-governing states in free association with New Zealand.

**The Pacific** refers geographically to those countries and territories in the South West Pacific.

**New Zealand's region** encompasses an expansive, diverse, and largely maritime area, spanning from Antarctica through to the Pacific, west toward Australia, and north-west toward South-East Asia.

**The wider Indo-Pacific** broadly encompasses the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and the countries and territories located there.

8. New Zealand is facing a more challenging strategic environment than we have for decades, with increasing threats to our security. The effectiveness and stability of the post-war liberal rules-based international system are being undermined. Both the use, and threat of use, of military power are increasingly shaping states' interactions. These challenges are also faced by Australia, the Pacific, and other states that share our interests and values.

## Strategic competition has returned to centre stage

9. New Zealand has benefitted from a strategic environment characterised by an international rules-based system that reflects our values and supports our interests. This system of international law, norms, and institutions contributes to stability, and enables collective action across a range of issues.
10. Over recent years, growing strategic competition has challenged the effectiveness of this system: some states are increasingly seeking to advance competing visions for regional and global orders that are at odds with the international rules-based system. This competition is prompting major powers and regional states to adopt more proactive postures and invest in defence and other instruments of national power<sup>3</sup>. We are experiencing the effect of this intensifying competition in New Zealand, in the Pacific, and the wider Indo-Pacific.

<sup>3</sup> Other instruments of national power may include diplomacy (including international development), economic relations, and the use of information.

11. Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 shows its ongoing disregard for fundamental international laws and norms. Russia presents an acute threat to European security and is challenging the international rules-based system and states' security and wellbeing through its use of hybrid warfare, political interference, grey zone<sup>4</sup> tactics, and economic coercion.
12. The international response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine has included expansive sanctions regimes, provision of weapons and training to Ukraine, and renewed commitments to international security arrangements designed to support collective security. These activities demonstrate the willingness of states across the globe to contest actions that threaten the international rules-based system and its underlying liberal democratic principles.
13. The relationship with **China** is significant for New Zealand, and its cooperation will continue to be essential in addressing many global challenges. At the same time, the Chinese Government's assertive pursuit of its strategic objectives is the major driver for the new era of strategic competition among states. An increasingly powerful China is using all its instruments of national power in ways that can pose challenges to existing international rules and norms. Beijing continues to invest heavily in growing and modernising its military, and is increasingly able to project military and paramilitary force beyond its immediate region, including across the wider Indo-Pacific.
14. The **wider Indo-Pacific** is now the central global theatre for strategic competition. Indo-Pacific states are rapidly investing in their military and security capabilities in response to the range of security challenges they are facing. Intensifying strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific is increasing the potential for confrontation and means conflict could occur, potentially with little warning. Potential triggers include increasing tensions relating to Taiwan, maritime tensions and competing claims in the South and East China Seas, and ongoing tensions on the Korean Peninsula, exacerbated by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's nuclear weapon and missile programmes. Even without deliberate intent, tactical miscalculation could lead to conflict with consequences that could spread across the region, including into the Pacific. Heightened competition and tensions in disputed areas of the Indo-Pacific pose potentially significant impacts for New Zealand's interests.
15. Over recent years, **the Pacific** has become increasingly significant as a theatre for strategic competition. The Chinese Government in particular has sought to grow its political, economic, and security influence in the Pacific at the expense of more traditional partners such as New Zealand and Australia.
16. While growing strategic interest in the Pacific may generate positive benefits such as additional development support, it also presents substantial risks to regional security, and the sovereignty and agency of Pacific Island countries. Activities that would be of significant concern include: the establishment of a persistent military presence by a state that does not share New Zealand's Pacific security interests and values; military or para-military-backed resource exploitation (particularly fisheries); or even military confrontation or conflict.
17. With increasing strategic interest in **New Zealand's** region we face the prospect of growing challenges to our security and interests within our broader maritime domain. This could include: challenges to New Zealand's sovereign authority over our maritime domain; reductions to our freedom of movement and action in the Pacific and Southern Ocean; and increasing threats to our physical, electronic, and space-based connections to the world.
18. Strategic interest in the **Southern Ocean and Antarctica** is also growing. The Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) seeks to preserve Antarctica exclusively as a place for peace, science, and international cooperation, and is important for protecting New Zealand's interests. But the ATS is not immune to pressure from growing strategic competition, and some states see the region as a potential location for a range of military and security-related activities.

<sup>4</sup> Grey zone refers to activities short of conflict such as propaganda, sabotage, clandestine military actions and foreign interference.

## The impacts of climate change are intensifying

19. Addressing the impacts of climate change will be one of the greatest global challenges of coming decades. The 2018 *Boe Declaration*, agreed by leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum countries and territories, recognised climate change as the single greatest threat to the security and wellbeing of the Pacific. The impacts of climate change will exacerbate existing fragilities within Pacific Island countries and across the region, which in turn can increase economic and governance risks.

20. Countries experiencing climate change stresses may require greater external support, which can – in a context of increasing global strategic competition – increase their vulnerability to influence and coercion. Responses to security events and humanitarian crises in the Pacific are already attracting growing interest from states outside the region, with varying motivations. This will likely lead to an increase in opportunistic actors who may act in ways that are counter to the interests of the Pacific and New Zealand.

**Addressing the impacts of climate change will be one of the greatest global challenges of coming decades.**

# Global impacts and implications of climate change

## Climate effects

- Rising temperatures
- Melting ice
- Sea level rise
- Ocean acidification
- Intensifying cyclones
- Changing rainfall patterns (floods/droughts)
- Increasing wildfires

## Environmental impacts

- Coral bleaching
- Decreasing and shifting fish stocks and marine life
- Coastal erosion
- Decline in agricultural productivity and nutrient dense food
- Decline in freshwater resources
- Declining efficiency of natural carbon sinks
- Biodiversity loss
- Wildfire

## Economic and social impacts

- Loss of livelihoods and educational opportunities
- Declining food and water security
- Damage to infrastructure
- Increasing migration and displacement within and between borders
- Negative health outcomes
- Economic losses including supply chain disruptions and impacts to important or climate-sensitive sectors
- Eroding of cultural identity, traditional ways of life, and tangible and intangible assets

## Safety and security risks

- Increased morbidity and mortality
- Human security challenges
- Resource competition and conflict
- Land and maritime disputes
- Conflict over cross-border migration and displacement
- Damage to critical infrastructure
- Ungoverned unilateral geo-engineering
- Exacerbated geopolitical tensions
- Instability within countries
- Strain on militaries' resources and readiness
- Increased demand for humanitarian assistance/ disaster relief operations and aid
- Inundation of geographic features from which maritime zones are measured
- States uninhabitable, temporarily or permanently, due to sea-level rise or severe weather

**Pacific Island Forum leaders have emphasised the threats of climate change and sea-level rise as the defining issues that imperil livelihood and wellbeing, and that these undermine the full realisation of a peaceful, secure, and sustainable future for the Pacific region.**



## A range of other trends are putting pressure on international security

21. Strategic competition and climate change are intersecting with a range of other security challenges and trends that impact New Zealand's broader strategic environment:

- The **COVID-19 pandemic** has been both a context for, and contributor to, strategic competition. Although pandemic responses included extensive international cooperation, the pandemic also demonstrated the challenges faced by states and multilateral institutions in responding to complex global issues and managing significant supply chain disruptions.
- State and non-state **competition for natural resources** is ongoing, placing pressure on state economies and stability. Marine resources, rare earth minerals, food stocks, freshwater, and energy sources are under increasing pressure and competition as states seek to secure supply and resource access. This is also impacted by climate change, as food stocks and freshwater resources are at increased risk due to changing temperatures and climate conditions.
- **Technological advances** are having far-reaching impacts on the character of military operations and conflict. Artificial intelligence and quantum technologies will be increasingly transformational. Information-related technologies in particular are changing the way militaries operate and network, even as newly developed capabilities are employed alongside more traditional tools.
- The information environment is more and more instrumental in shaping and influencing security outcomes, and this environment is increasingly contested. The growth of online spaces has enabled the spread of **disinformation** at a global level that threatens trust in democratic institutions and elected authorities, as well as undermining social cohesion; all of which can have a destabilising effect on societies.
- The threats of **terrorism and violent extremism** are evolving and overlapping with challenges such as disinformation. While global terrorist groups are less pervasive, they are nevertheless a persistent threat.
- **Trans-national organised crime** is a corrupting influence world-wide, including in the Pacific. State and non-state actors can collaborate and leverage these networks to undermine national security, including by destabilising governance.



IMAGE: Exercise Veijitaki is designed to test students in command, leadership and battle craft in a jungle environment. Held in the Republic of Fiji, officer cadets are several months into their year long course which will see them graduate as Army Officers at the end of 2022.

**This more proactive and purposeful approach emphasises deliberate Defence actions to shape our strategic environment and prevent threats to New Zealand's interests, with a particular emphasis on activities in and for the Pacific.**

# Te Kaupapahere Waonga o Aotearoa / Part Two: New Zealand's Defence Policy

22. With a changing and more challenging strategic environment, New Zealand's defence policy settings must be updated to ensure Defence<sup>5</sup> is best placed to support New Zealand's security, resilience, and wellbeing.
23. This *Defence Policy and Strategy Statement* sets out New Zealand's updated defence approach, which emphasises the promotion and protection of New Zealand's defence and wider security interests. This more proactive and purposeful approach emphasises deliberate Defence actions to shape our strategic environment and prevent threats to New Zealand's interests, with a particular emphasis on activities in and for the Pacific.
24. This new proactive, strategy-led approach still requires Defence to anticipate and respond to events and disruptions in the strategic environment, including through the employment of combat capabilities if required.
25. New Zealand's new defence policy includes a strong focus on; engaging with and influencing other states and international institutions to build support for New Zealand's security interests; building the capacity of Pacific defence and security capabilities against security challenges, and enhancing regional security arrangements that support our interests; and preventing actions counter to New Zealand's interests.
26. This defence policy reinforces New Zealand's long-standing commitment to collective security, with Australia and our other Five Eyes partners, other Pacific Island countries, and our partners in the wider Indo-Pacific and further afield. It also maintains our independent decision-making and capacity for independent action. Defence activities will continue to form a key component of New Zealand's overall contribution to our international partnerships, and to the international rules-based system as a whole.

## What is Defence Policy?

Defence policy is one aspect of national security policy, and is Government direction that:

- Establishes the policy objectives that Defence will deliver, or contribute to delivering;
- Guides the development of defence strategy, which describes the ways in which Defence will achieve those objectives alongside other tools of statecraft; and
- Determines how Defence will be organised, equipped, and resourced to deliver on the policy objectives.

## What is Defence's role?

The New Zealand Defence Force is the only tool of government equipped and mandated to apply military force. Its fundamental role is the generation and application of military capabilities and combat force to defend New Zealand and advance its defence and security interests. As such, Defence leads and participates in activity to address threats to our national security.

Defence can also provide options and tools, as part of an all-of-Government approach, to pursue New Zealand's wider national and international interests and objectives. This includes providing support to other government agencies to assist with civil defence and emergency management, maritime patrolling, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief offshore, and presence in support of diplomatic initiatives.

These roles are underpinned by a highly professional, well-trained, and skilled Defence workforce, which in itself is a strategic asset for New Zealand.

<sup>5</sup> This refers, in the New Zealand context, to both the New Zealand Defence Force and the Ministry of Defence.

## Being secure at home ensures New Zealand has the capacity to engage and contribute internationally.

### New Zealand's defence policy interests

27. New Zealand's defence policy seeks to promote and protect four mutually supporting interests.

#### A secure, sovereign, and resilient New Zealand

28. Central to New Zealand's security and wellbeing is the safeguarding of our territorial integrity. Being secure at home ensures New Zealand has the capacity to engage and contribute internationally. Defence works alongside other agencies to protect New Zealand against a range of security threats. This includes ensuring New Zealand's authority and freedom of action across our broader maritime domain, including the protection of marine resources, and our ability to freely use sea, air, space, and cyber lines of communication.
29. New Zealand's security and wellbeing also depend on national resilience: our readiness and ability to effectively respond to and recover from adverse events. Defence capabilities play an important role in contributing to responses to national contingencies, for example earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and storms.

#### A stable, secure, and resilient region

30. New Zealand shares with other Pacific Island countries, Australia, and our other security partners, a strong and enduring interest in maintaining a stable, secure, prosperous, and resilient region. Close people, cultural, trade, and security connections with other countries in the region means any instability will directly impact New Zealand and New Zealanders.

31. The *Boe Declaration* identified climate change as the primary strategic threat to Pacific Island countries, and the direct and increasing impacts from climate change are exacerbating stability risks and increasing demands for resilience building and disaster response. The Declaration also recognised that geopolitical dynamics are leading to an increasingly crowded and complex Pacific. The changing operating context in the region significantly increases the prospect of more sophisticated threats than have previously been present, which will require increasingly integrated, well-coordinated efforts across New Zealand's tools of statecraft.

32. New Zealand's approach is informed by Pacific Island countries' priorities in working to address underlying drivers of insecurity in the Pacific, and supporting the resilience of the region against security challenges and threats. This includes the priorities set out in the *Boe Declaration* and the Pacific Island Forum's 2050 *Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*. Alongside other agencies, Defence will work with Pacific partners to build collective regional resilience and reinforce desired norms and practices. This includes, for example, working with Pacific partners to build overall regional capacity, supporting shared awareness of activities in our region, and deterring actions contrary to our shared interests.

33. Defence will continue to respond, together with Pacific Island countries and key security partners such as Australia, to security threats and environmental and humanitarian crises across the Pacific. Activities such as maritime patrolling provide presence and assurance, and support economic resilience which in turn underpins broader social stability.

34. Looking south, New Zealand has strategic interests in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean. These include: New Zealand's sovereign claim to the Ross Dependency, environmental and security interests in the Southern Ocean, and supporting the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS). Defence's role includes support to the New Zealand Antarctic Programme and to New Zealand's engagement with the ATS and the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR).

#### Collective security through a strong network of partners

35. New Zealand's security is assured by collective security and the strength and capability derived from it, primarily through a strong network of partners. New Zealand is globally connected and engaged, and these international relationships and partnerships are fundamental to our security and wellbeing.
36. New Zealand's alliance with Australia and our other international security partnerships enable and amplify our contributions to collective security efforts, support our international influence and access, and ultimately provide protections for New Zealand itself. New Zealand's contributions to collective security efforts demonstrate our commitment to the international rules-based system and ensure a seat at the table when decisions are made on significant global and regional issues. To be effective in achieving these outcomes, our contributions must be operationally credible, valued by partners, and demonstrate New Zealand's willingness to work and share risks alongside others.

## Our International Security Partnerships

New Zealand's security is deeply connected with that of **Australia**. Our only formal defence ally works with us across the range of defence and security activities. This is especially important in the Pacific and wider Indo-Pacific, where Defence coordinates and works most closely together to pursue our shared interests. Over several decades Defence has strengthened and deepened the partnership, drawing on our distinctive strengths and national perspectives.

New Zealand has strong cultural and historical ties to the **Pacific**. New Zealand also has constitutional responsibilities to Cook Islands, Niue, and Tokelau. Our defence relationships in the Pacific are complemented and reinforced by a wide range of New Zealand agencies that are represented and operating across the Pacific. In addition to bilateral relationships, particularly with Pacific military and security agencies, Defence supports New Zealand's overall involvement with Pacific regional architectures. This includes the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) as the premier regional organisation, alongside more specific arrangements such as the South Pacific Defence Ministers Meeting (SPDMM), the Defence Secretaries' Dialogue, Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), and Pacific Quadrilateral Defence Coordination Group (Pacific Quads).

In addition to directly supporting shared regional security interests, New Zealand can also advocate for and support Pacific partners elsewhere, and can enhance the global profile of Pacific Island countries by, for example, involving them in combined defence activities further afield.

New Zealand is responsible for the defence and security of Tokelau, as a non-self-governing territory of New Zealand. This is a responsibility which in practice would only be discharged in consultation with Tokelau. The Cook Islands and Niue are self-governing states in free association with New Zealand. New Zealand has a constitutional responsibility to assist them with defence, if that assistance is requested by their Governments.

The **United States** is a crucial defence partner for New Zealand, with defence engagement deepening over the past decade since the signing of the Wellington and Washington declarations in 2010 and 2012. The United States has long underwritten security in the Indo-Pacific, and is taking an increasingly close interest in contributing to security in the Pacific (as seen in the United States' increased focus on the Pacific as part of the broader Indo-Pacific in its 2022 *National Defense Strategy*). In 2022 President Biden and Prime Minister Ardern committed to increasing defence coordination and interoperability, including co-deployments. Their joint statement recognised the growing focus of security and defence in the relationship. New Zealand's relationships with Australia, the United States, **United Kingdom**, and **Canada** are part of the overall **Five Eyes** partnership, a critical grouping of countries that share fundamental values and interests. Defence derives enormous benefit from this partnership, including access to intelligence and defence capabilities, information technologies and military developments that would otherwise be unachievable. It is in New Zealand's interest to contribute to the effectiveness of this partnership. The Five Eyes are also developing and supporting other multinational partnerships that may provide opportunities for New Zealand to further pursue our interests, including the AUKUS and Indo-Pacific Quad (United States, India, Japan, Australia) arrangements.

New Zealand is increasingly grappling with similar security issues to those facing **Indo-Pacific** states. New Zealand's relationships with Asia involve both strong bilateral partnerships, including with **Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, India, Viet Nam, the Philippines, and Indonesia**, as well as multinational security mechanisms such as the **ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus)** and the **Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA – involving Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, and the United Kingdom)**. These regional architectures and relationships enable New Zealand to contribute to regional security, and support New Zealand's broader interests in Asia.

New Zealand has strong and active defence relationships with European states, conducted both bilaterally and through multilateral groupings, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (**NATO**) and the European Union. These defence links are built on long-standing shared values and interests. These relationships also provide invaluable access to sophisticated capabilities and opportunities for cooperation in operational theatres. European states, notably including **France** and **Germany**, are also seeking to engage more actively in the Indo-Pacific, even as Russia's invasion of Ukraine has required increased focus on Europe. France is also an important partner in the Pacific in its own right given its existing presence and interests there.

Elsewhere, New Zealand's defence relationships have developed in response either to collective security requirements and threats to the international rules-based system, or for wider strategic benefit. Notably, this has occurred in the **Middle East** and **Africa**. Some of these arrangements are longstanding and complement New Zealand's deep trade and economic relationships with these regions.

## Defence will act early, purposefully, and deliberately in promoting and protecting New Zealand's defence interests in our region.

### A strong and effective international rules-based system

37. The international rules-based system, centred on multilateralism and liberal democratic values, is fundamental to New Zealand's security. As a small state, New Zealand benefits from the certainty, predictability, fairness and equality, universality, and safeguards inherent in a rules-based system that reflects our values, and that amplifies our global role and influence far beyond our size and location.
38. New Zealand's long-standing support for the international rules-based system – including through the United Nations system – together with Defence contributions to global peace support operations, directly contributes to the strength and effectiveness of the rules-based system and enhances New Zealand's international standing. In addition to operational contributions, New Zealand works with other states to maintain and develop rules and norms that support international peace and security.

### New Zealand's defence policy objectives

39. With an emphasis on acting early and deliberately to pursue New Zealand's security, and a particular focus on the Pacific, our defence policy objectives are to:
- Promote and protect New Zealand's defence interests in our region, particularly in the Pacific;
  - Contribute globally to collective security efforts that promote and protect New Zealand's interests and values; and
  - Respond to events in New Zealand, in our region, and globally where required.

### Promoting and protecting our defence interests in our region, particularly in the Pacific

40. New Zealand is now facing greater challenges to our security in our region than we have for decades. Our region is now a strategic theatre, and New Zealand needs a defence posture that reflects this reality. Defence will act early, purposefully, and deliberately in promoting and protecting New Zealand's defence interests in our region, including our broader maritime domain, the Southern Ocean and Antarctica, and in the Pacific.

41. New Zealand's security requires that Pacific Island countries are secure, sovereign, and resilient, and that Pacific security challenges are met in ways that support our shared interests in Pacific regional security. Defence, and New Zealand as a whole, must support Pacific Island countries in ways that reflect their own security needs, and in ways that support Pacific regionalism.
42. The more challenging strategic environment increases the potential that external actors will behave in ways that undermine New Zealand's interests in Pacific regional security. A primary Defence goal will be to prevent states that do not share New Zealand's interests and values from establishing or normalising a military or paramilitary presence in our region. Such a development would fundamentally alter the regional strategic balance, threaten the freedom of action of New Zealand and our security partners, and undermine regional stability.

Contributing globally to collective security efforts that promote and protect New Zealand's interests and values

43. New Zealand's interests are global, and Defence will continue to contribute to global security through ongoing operations and activities beyond our region, including commitments to peace support operations and combat if necessary. These contributions enhance collective security efforts and keep security challenges at a distance from New Zealand.
44. Defence contributions must be operationally credible and valued by partners to a level that demonstrates New Zealand's willingness to accept risks alongside others in pursuit of collective security outcomes. Participating in collective security efforts and activities outside our region is essential to the generation of Defence's combat-capable, interoperable, and expeditionary character.
45. New Zealand has a particular interest in Indo-Pacific security. This is where challenges to global security are greatest, where our security partners are closely engaged, where Defence contributions would be expected, and where our economic and strategic interests converge. Defence will focus on contributing

to activities that reinforce the international rules-based system, such as exercising our rights under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS), and that support the sovereignty and security of regional states.

Responding to events in New Zealand, our region, and globally where required

46. Within our more proactive defence policy approach, Defence is still required to respond to events at home, in our region, and further afield, across the spectrum of operations, using combat capable, globally relevant military forces.
47. Defence capabilities will continue to form a key component of Government's overall ability to respond to national contingencies, deliver public services, and support New Zealand's broader national resilience.
48. In the Pacific, Defence will continue to respond to a wide range of events, notably Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) activities and Stability and Support Operations (SASO) in support of Pacific Island countries. Defence will also maintain capabilities that can respond globally, at Government direction, to security and other events across the spectrum of operations.

**Defence will continue to contribute to global security through ongoing operations and activities beyond our region, including commitments to peace support operations and combat if necessary.**

# New Zealand's defence strategy emphasises three mutually reinforcing themes: Understand, Partner, and Act

IMAGE: No. 230 Squadron communications personnel establishing high frequency communication sites across three locations in an exercise on Viti Levu Island, Fiji.





# Te Rautaki Waonga o Aotearoa / Part Three: New Zealand's Defence Strategy

49. Giving effect to New Zealand's defence policy settings requires a clear strategy to guide operational planning, capability development, enterprise management, and investment. **New Zealand's defence strategy emphasises three mutually reinforcing themes:**

- **Understand** – Defence will have increased awareness of our strategic and operating environments by maximising the use of defence capabilities and technologies;
- **Partner** – Defence will improve and enhance our partnerships within and beyond New Zealand to support collective security approaches to shared challenges, and maximise interoperability with security partners; and
- **Act** – Defence will be more ready and able to promote and protect New Zealand's interests by shaping our security environment and maintaining a credible, combat-capable, deployable force able to operate across the spectrum of operations (from humanitarian assistance through to combat).

## Understand

50. As part of all-of-Government efforts, Defence will deepen its contribution to New Zealand's knowledge and understanding of the overall strategic environment. Defence will improve its insight into strategic issues and developments with a particular focus on our immediate region, and the wider Indo-Pacific.

### Expanding awareness of our territory and region

51. Defence has a key role in proactively collecting, processing, and sharing information to build situational awareness of key operational theatres, and identifying and understanding state and non-state actions that threaten New Zealand's interests. New approaches and a wider range of capabilities to build awareness will assist this, such as expanding the use of space-based systems. Improving the relevance, timeliness and utility of information will be key to enhancing collaboration with international security partners.

### Contributing to the development of situational awareness with Pacific partners

52. Defence will cooperate with domestic and international partners to support the development of a common operating picture that integrates information from regional and other partners. Defence, alongside other New Zealand agencies, will expand information sharing about security issues with other Pacific Island countries to enable collective understanding, resilience building, and action.

### Deepening our understanding of our region's security needs and amplifying Pacific voices

53. Alongside Pacific Island countries, Australia, and our other key partners, Defence will work to deepen shared understanding of our region's security needs, including the Southern Ocean and Antarctica. This will include in particular seeking and incorporating Pacific Island countries' perspectives on the principal challenges facing the Pacific, including climate change, strategic competition, and other trans-national issues. This will support efforts to amplify Pacific voices internationally.

54. This activity will enable Defence to support Pacific Island countries, build regional resilience, and reduce the space for external states that do not share New Zealand's interests and values to grow their presence and influence.

## Partner

55. Partnerships are essential to New Zealand Defence's success. Defence works in coordination with other New Zealand agencies and international partners. These partnerships shape how Defence plans, prepares, and acts, and the capabilities Defence acquires and operates.

### Collaborating more to address shared security challenges

56. Defence will continue to enhance its collaboration with the wider national security sector to promote New Zealand's security and other interests, both domestically and internationally. This includes cooperating on both shared policy and strategy development in response to our changing strategic environment, and operational preparedness and delivery.

57. Defence will invest in New Zealand's international security partnerships, enhancing bilateral and wider arrangements, in order to understand and influence collective responses to shared challenges. Defence will focus on working with partners to build resilience against security challenges and threats, including state and non-state coercion and other hostile behaviours, as well as addressing the increasing impacts of climate change. This will include the use of defence science cooperation, such as our work on climate change in the Southern Ocean, especially where New Zealand is able to provide unique contributions – such as our work in the Southern Ocean.

58. Defence will work with and through New Zealand's international partners to reduce opportunities that could be exploited in ways that threaten our shared interests, such as by ensuring regional security needs are met. A key element will be to reinforce international standards and norms of behaviour, and the international rules-based system, in particular United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS).

59. Defence will continue to work with partners and with industry to leverage shared expertise and knowledge on military technological developments. Defence will improve the effectiveness of its defence science and technology capability and partnerships. New Zealand's Five Eyes partners will be particularly important in this regard. AUKUS Pillar Two may present an opportunity for New Zealand to cooperate with close security partners on emerging technologies<sup>6</sup>.

### Maximising opportunities with Australia

60. Australia is New Zealand's most critical defence and security partner and our only formal ally. Defence will continue to work with Australia across the span of security activities in our region and further afield in ways that leverage our combined strengths.

### Australia

Defence activities will be part of an overall, deliberate coordinated bilateral approach to promoting and protecting our shared security interests, both within our region and further afield. As part of New Zealand's overall partnership with Australia, Defence will identify and pursue opportunities to update and expand defence cooperation and combined effectiveness. This will include better coordination on defence policy development, increasing personnel exchanges, strengthening joint operational capabilities, and enhancing planning for combined responses to regional events.

<sup>6</sup> AUKUS refers to the security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. AUKUS Pillar Two encompasses developing advanced technologies to support defence and security capabilities.



IMAGE: Exercise Talisman Sabre. No. 3 Squadron fly in formation with RAAF Chinooks as part of the integration build up training.

**Australia is  
New Zealand's  
most critical  
defence  
and security  
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our only  
formal ally.**

# Defence's relationships with other Pacific Island countries are central to New Zealand's ability to work with others to build regional approaches to security challenges.

## Interoperability and engagement with our security partners

61. Interoperability underpins effective combined activities, and supports Defence's global credibility and influence. Investment in interoperability will focus on those capabilities and activities that most directly enable Defence's promotion and protection of New Zealand's defence interests, including contributions to collective security efforts.
62. In addition to Australia, Defence will ensure its interoperability with our critical defence partners: the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada (our Five Eyes partners), as well as other security partners that share New Zealand's values and interests. Given the acute nature of the challenges to security in the wider Indo-Pacific, Defence will build on the foundations of its existing cooperation with key partners both bilaterally and multilaterally. This includes Singapore, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, and Japan, in particular, as well as India, Viet Nam, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Beyond the Indo-Pacific, this includes NATO and the European Union.

## Partnering in the Pacific

63. Defence's relationships with other Pacific Island countries are central to New Zealand's ability to work with others to build regional approaches to security challenges. Defence will continue to use the Vaka Tahī Partnership Model to guide its Pacific relationships. This approach to Pacific partnering reflects that New Zealand is a committed, capable and reliable partner to Pacific Island countries.

## Vaka Tahī Partnership Model

The Vaka Tahī ("one boat") Pacific Partnership Model allows us to be more deliberate in our efforts to be a reliable and valued partner across Defence. The model (explained in further detail in *Advancing Pacific Partnerships, 2019*) has two principal components:

**Partnership in Context** – Seek to build valued, sustainable partnerships across Pacific communities and Pacific nations, and support Pacific collective empowerment and contributions to the world. This defines the contours of our engagement, from protecting our environment and assisting when natural disasters strike, through to support for Pacific sovereignty, leadership building, gender equality, and collective empowerment.

**Partnership in Action** – Through reflection on past engagements and shared cultural traditions, Defence has distilled a series of actions important to building reliable, valued partnerships, and has considered they only form a whole when they are woven together. These include: planning and acting together; valuing people-to-people ties and our interdependence; and building trust, reciprocity and transparency.



IMAGE: At the end of Exercise Veiiutaki, the cadets engage with the local community. Nausori Highlands Village provided hospitality whilst the cadets took the opportunity to help out with a variety of tasks. A traditional Kava ceremony was held to welcome the NZDF and the RFMF.

64. Defence is part of broader New Zealand engagement into the Pacific, and Defence capabilities are often critical enablers for New Zealand's wider Pacific objectives. Defence's people-to-people ties into the region and across Pacific Island countries enable both regional cooperation and direct operational support for Pacific Island countries' security and wellbeing. Defence will continue to work with other agencies, Pacific partners, and others to support and strengthen regional security arrangements.
65. The significance of climate change to Pacific security means Defence must support Pacific Island countries to build their climate change resilience, for instance by supporting the capacity of Pacific defence and security forces to increase their capacity and capabilities to act in more hostile environments, and to increase the resilience of their infrastructure.

## Act

66. The pace of geo-strategic change and the increasingly challenging strategic environment require Defence to become more agile in identifying, preparing for, and acting to protect and promote New Zealand's interests. This includes both proactive shaping activities, such as supporting international security arrangements that reinforce desired norms of behaviour, and responses to events across the spectrum of cooperation to conflict, including combat.
67. Defence must be able to defend, if necessary, New Zealand's sovereign territory and maritime interests. Defence will be ready to commit to global security efforts, particularly where New Zealand's interests are clearly engaged.

## Improving the effectiveness of our combat and other military capabilities

68. Defence will seek to improve the readiness and effectiveness of its combat and other military capabilities to respond to events at home, in New Zealand's region, and globally. Defence will seek to increase its focus on activities and operations to shape New Zealand's security environment, enable New Zealand's freedom of action, build resilience, and prevent actions counter to New Zealand's interests. Defence will need to act earlier to prevent threats, for example through increased presence, as part of broader New Zealand efforts and in concert with international partners. Where possible, Defence will seek to act to constrain hostile actions, will be prepared to employ military force, and engage in combat if required.

## Increasing our presence and strengthening defence resilience and security capacity in the Pacific

69. A key element of New Zealand's more proactive and deliberate defence policy will include lifting Defence's presence in the Pacific. This increased Defence presence in the Pacific is part of a broader New Zealand effort to support overall Pacific security and resilience. Defence will work with Pacific partners to identify opportunities where a lift in Defence's presence would support shared security outcomes. This could include capability building, with civilian and military staff embedded in local agencies to provide technical assistance, leadership, and policy support, and greater cooperation in operations and exercises.
70. A more consistent presence will enable Defence to better understand Pacific regional trends, contribute to building the region's resilience against emerging security challenges, and assure Pacific Island countries in meeting their security needs. Defence will also seek opportunities for deeper collaboration with Pacific Island countries, through a range of bilateral and multilateral mechanisms.
71. Defence will also act with other New Zealand agencies to build both Pacific Island countries' and regional resilience against climate change and other security threats and challenges. This includes building the capacity of defence and security forces to respond to natural disasters or in support of development programmes.

## Responding to security events in our region

72. Humanitarian and Disaster Relief (HADR) responses will continue to be a key Defence role in the Pacific. Demand for HADR responses will likely rise as the incidence and intensity of climate change-driven severe weather events, such as tropical cyclones and droughts, increase. Defence will leverage the FRANZ (France, Australia, and New Zealand) and Pacific Quad arrangements (Australia, France, New Zealand, and United States) in such responses.
73. Climate change-related impacts will also exacerbate other stresses that can contribute to instability within Pacific Island countries. Defence will continue to work with Pacific and like-minded partners to prepare for and conduct stability and support operations (SASO) across the region.

## Preventing actions counter to New Zealand's interests

74. In order to successfully promote and protect our defence interests in a competitive environment, Defence must be able to contribute to wider prevention efforts. Defence will also need to deny opportunities to other actors, increase our presence, and provide assurance to Pacific partners. To do so, Defence must have a modern, relevant, and prepared combat force and other military capabilities that can effectively contribute to wider collective efforts.
75. Defence will seek to be a partner of choice through assuring Pacific Island countries that their security needs will be understood; that New Zealand would be a reliable and consistent partner; and that New Zealand will not hesitate to act when it is in our best collective interest to do so. This includes greater Defence efforts to support Pacific Island countries' security needs.
76. In the Southern Ocean and Antarctica, Defence will support broader New Zealand efforts to uphold the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) and maintain New Zealand's strategic interests. At home, Defence will focus on protecting New Zealand's maritime security interests within our broader maritime domain.



IMAGE: Soldiers from Linton's 1 Brigade take part in the Confidence Course Challenge to race for the fastest time. A max of 10 soldiers per unit participate going through the obstacles.



# Mutungu / Conclusion

77. New Zealand's defence interests – in a sovereign, secure, and resilient territory; a stable, secure, and resilient region; collective security through a strong network of partners; and a strong rules-based international system – are threatened in a way we have not experienced for decades.
78. In response, New Zealand's defence policy has changed and this *Defence Policy and Strategy Statement 2023* emphasises early and deliberate action to shape the security environment. Defence's relationships with other Pacific Island countries are central to New Zealand's security, and to the security of the region. By lifting efforts to understand, partner, and act in the Pacific, it is recognised that this is where Defence can often have the greatest material impact.
79. Defence will promote and protect New Zealand's interests, particularly in the Pacific; contribute globally to collective security efforts to protect our interests and values; and respond to events at home, in our region, and globally where required.
80. These policy objectives will be achieved by pursuing activities under three broad themes: understanding our strategic and operating environments; partnering with others to maximise collective security efforts and interoperability; and acting to shape our strategic environment with a combat-capable, credible, deployable force that can respond when and where required.
81. This *Defence Policy and Strategy Statement 2023* will guide Defence's planning, operations, engagements, and investment in order to ensure that Defence is fit-for-purpose in an increasingly challenging and complex world. While this document does not in itself require the Government to follow particular investment tracks and the activities set out are scalable, it will be used alongside the *Future Force Design Principles* to inform future funding proposals.
82. The Statement will be followed by the *Future Force Design Principles*, which assesses the assumptions underpinning Defence – particularly the key enablers of workforce and infrastructure – to help guide force design. The *Future Force Design Principles* will also consider concurrency and coherence when considering Defence's capacity to meet future challenges.
83. The choices presented in the *Future Force Design Principles* will require trade-offs that will ultimately shape the vision New Zealand has for its defence policy.

IMAGE: 2nd Engineer Regiment, 2nd Combat Service Support Battalion, 5th/7th Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment together with HMNZS Te Mana Ship's company supplied members of the community of Dartmoor, much needed fuel supplies after a bridge collapsed in the wake of Cyclone Gabrielle. NZDF personnel crossed the river carrying fuel in Gerry cans in order to reach the community.







**MANATŪ KAUPAPA  
WAONGA**  
NEW ZEALAND  
MINISTRY OF DEFENCE



TE OPE KĀTUA O AOTEAROA  
**DEFENCE FORCE**