

NEW ZEALAND NATIONAL SECURITY: Challenges, Trends and Issues

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This book offers a timely consideration of the key trends, issues and national security challenges facing New Zealand. Split into three parts, its scope is broad; it contains fifteen chapters by academics (mainly from Massey's Centre for Defence and Security Studies) and government practitioners. This approach is a fruitful one, as chapters that contextualise changing trends and consider some of the emerging 'big' national security questions are complemented by more practical-minded treatments that outline agency structures, operations and priorities.

In the introduction, Dr William Hoverd establishes the book's thematic basis. He explains that security, as concept and practise, has evolved since the end of the Cold War. In the context of a globalised international system, security is now fundamentally linked to a nation's global inter-connectedness: the state is no longer the alpha and omega, with non-state threats and inter-state links multiplying. ISIS acts as an example: a threat that operates somewhat like a traditional state but also uses the IT revolution to spread its message and inspire attacks abroad, with attendant risks for New Zealand. Another key theme is that the New Zealand security sector has internalised and operationalised the conceptual widening of security. As such, a 'whole-of-government' approach and response to security issues is increasingly common.

Chapters by Professors Rouben Azizian and Aileen San Pablo-Baviera explain that China's growing economic heft and assertive policies are altering the Asia-Pacific regional order, bringing China into contention with the United States. Given the diverging vectors of Wellington's trading relationship with China and its security/intelligence links with the United States, New Zealand's 'independent' credentials and ability to maintain equilibrium are at risk. There is no easy solution to this conflict of interest. The authors recommend that New Zealand adopt a proactive strategy to shape security architectures, and consider acting as an interlocutor of sorts to aid China and the United States to establish a common security agenda. While an attractive idea, in interviews a co-author (Waikato PhD candidate Francesca Dodd-Parr) and I conducted last year we found that a majority of local academics and agency practitioners vehemently opposed this course of action. Nonetheless, the logic and practicalities of this proposal deserve fuller consideration, as it is possible 'group think' on this issue has taken hold.

Dr Anna Powles shows that trends are working against New

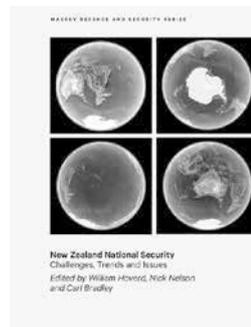
Zealand's influence in the South Pacific. Russia and China are playing larger roles, and there is a desire by island states to balance Anglo-Saxon influence and carve out a more region-specific multilateral agenda. This overlays a region that faces a growing array of complex governance, resource and economic challenges. Powles is provocative, and arguably correct, in calling for a radical strategic realignment in Wellington's approach to the region to prevent its further marginalisation.

Another key theme woven through the book, considered deeply by Dr Negar Partow, is the trend towards 'securitisation'. Partow describes how the state is losing its ability to control the information flow to citizens. The IT revolution is universalising access to information, leading to the emergence of transnational micro-communities, increasing the influence of non-state actors and reducing the mobilisation power of nationalism. Elites are thus turning to securitisation and 'othering' to retain their authority and ensure cohesion. The politics of fear, rather than hope and vision, is the order of the day. This is marginalising the democratic role of citizens in national security affairs at a time when the media and public seek greater transparency from government. While Negar implores New Zealand to re-conceptualise national security and emphasise the 'human security' of individuals, state elites are resistant, seeking to maintain the existing power distribution within states.

Howard Broad (deputy chief executive, Security and Intelligence, DPMC) provides a valuable insight into New Zealand's national security architecture, its objectives, operational capabilities and the emerging challenges and threats he sees facing New Zealand. He concludes with a thought provoking discussion of the issues that keep him awake at night. These include the different appreciation of risk held by the public compared to national security practitioners, and how to find the right policy balance to guide decision-making; and the need for some level of transparency to build trust between citizens and government that, if taken too far, could undermine parts of the system. He worries that the sector could miss something that turns out to be catastrophic. He ends with the mission statement, 'Forewarned is forearmed', which suggests the national security sector must remain vigilant.

Terry Johanson calls into question the efficacy of cross-government national security co-ordination, identifying a tension between the siloisation of individual agencies and the authority of the prime minister, who holds considerable authority to set the discourse of national security efforts. Worryingly, Johanson believes this prevents a sub-discourse on national security between agencies. As such, forging a national security strategy that separates political authority from security co-ordination, like the Australian model, is advised.

Dr Damian Rogers argues that we need to think carefully about the unintended effects of scholars working with or on behalf of government agencies. He states that this contains inherent risks, citing the case of the compliant/collusive relationship that emerged between the Australian National University and the Australian government in the 1990s. This could curtail our ability to comprehend emerging threats to New Zealand, and thus would be a self-inflicted wound for government officials, who could miss out on vital and diverse research as scholars direct themselves towards mundane (and politically insensitive) pursuits. This risk makes sustaining the intellectual independence of



scholars a vital issue. In my view, Rogers could not be more right on this issue. William Howard partly addresses this in the prior chapter, asserting that local research should have an evidentiary basis to strengthen its validity and conclusions. This is only part of the answer. If honest, all academics (and, I would wager, government employees) can attest to the force of self-censorship, especially when future research grants depend on sustaining positive academic-agency working relationships. If this is perceived to be dependent on what one chooses to write about, risk-aversion becomes a rational default position for scholars. Political correctness may further constrain intellectual inquiry, lest they touch upon deeply held ideological foreign policy positions. This could have catastrophic implications, as officials receive a steady stream of research that reinforces existing assumptions at a time when change is outstripping any individual's or organisation's ability to understand, let alone identify in a timely manner, emerging threats.

There are a number of questions I think worth raising as a result of the examination and tensions identified throughout the book. For example, at the level of primary strategic alignment, what other options exist beyond attempting to maintain 'balance' between China and the United States? Is neutrality an option, and what would the benefits and costs be? Is New Zealand a candidate to test dual-alignment with Beijing and Washington? And what would that look like? What are the risks of continually asserting to domestic and international audiences that we have an 'independent' foreign policy, bearing in mind the reality of our security and intelligence alignments? Other questions come to mind: why is there no national security strategy? What are the downsides of producing one? Do government agencies have effective strategic foresight capabilities? How do we go about building the connections between the national security sector and the population to 'initiate a whole-of-society discussion' that the book calls for? With this question in mind, should international relations be taught as a core component in high schools? What about teaching the value of liberal civics? What affects will the following trends have on international relations and New Zealand's national security: big data, artificial intelligence, nanotechnologies, economic and military robotisation, demographic changes, the rise of populism and the trend towards authoritarianism in a number of democracies, including the Trump administration's assault on America's democratic institutions.

The issues identified in the book, and perhaps some I note above, implore us to 'think through the unthinkable', and forge ongoing work programmes between and across academic and government institutions. Resourcing is urgently required to support this (perhaps a dedicated think tank focused on national security issues would prove valuable). After all, having broadened the concept of security, we must now question whether New Zealand has the intellectual capital — and researchers sufficient research time — to drill deep down and across the 'new' security issues identified in the book, and to consider the known and currently unknown threats on the horizon.

Ultimately, this is an excellent book containing a number of valuable contributions on topics I have not had space to address (such as border and maritime security, the role of New Zealand's special forces, cyber security, terrorism and organised crime). Students, scholars and practitioners should all find something of interest here, and hopefully the book inspires a programme of research to delve deeper into the issues it identifies.

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