

NZDF ROLE IN NZ FOREIGN POLICY¹

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The NZDF's contributions to New Zealand foreign policy are significant. Ranging from large scale HADR responses, to peacekeeping and peace enforcement in Timor Leste and the Solomon Islands, to small but potentially vital roles in Iraq and Afghanistan, to increasing defence diplomacy commitments, the NZDF is in fact over-used as part of New Zealand's foreign policy. This overreliance on the military instrument as part of foreign policy requires 1) a clear redrawing of the NZDF's role (either a drawing back to more traditional limits or to a complete revisioning of the force as a whole) as well as 2) a vision for and a commitment to ensuring increased OGA and NGO engagement in foreign policy to enable that redrawing to occur, whichever option is chosen.

Key findings

- The NZDF is a key player in supporting New Zealand's foreign policy objectives.
- This role has been extended into a range of areas, increasing organisational risk and increased militarisation.
- The NZDF should either be pulled back into stricter limits or be subject to a deeper reassessment. That is, one option would see the NZDF only engage in defence and deterrence roles. Alternatively, a more fundamental redrawing of the NZDF would require an emphasis on making the NZDF a 'constabulary' force – in this case the NZDF would be remade in a less militarised fashion, with less emphasis on alliance commitments and more on collective security and regional commitments.
- Whether a 'narrowing' or 'fundamental' re-envisioning of the NZDF's core purpose occurs, the capacity and capability of other government agencies should be reassessed and boosted to enable increased support of foreign policy objectives and a redrawing of NZDF engagement within a whole of government approach. This could include the creation of a civilian reserve or similar.

¹ The research undertaken for this paper is part of a broader Security, Politics and Development Network project run out of Massey University. The SPDN considers security, politics and development issues across a range of government and non-government agencies from a variety of different academic disciplines.



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Executive summary

Peter Jennings's (2016) assessment of the DWP 2016 as representing an "existential crisis about the shape, purpose, cost and direction" of the New Zealand Defence Force highlights that there is an element of uncertainty conveyed by the document. Just what is the central purpose of the NZDF which is supposed to be 'fit for purpose' (DWP 2016)? This chapter considers the strategic and operational directions laid out in recent New Zealand documents to ascertain projected roles for the New Zealand Defence Force in supporting New Zealand foreign policy objectives. Some of these are clearly military-only or military-first core taskings. Yet questions remain as to where the limits of NZDF engagement in foreign policy currently lie or should lie as much of the 2016 Defence White Paper and other documents emphasise the engagement of NZDF in *non-conventional* or non-core roles. This chapter explores these issues and suggests that we are at a 'fork in the road' moment. If the central purpose of the Defence Force is 'defence of New Zealand' and combat, then this should be the main emphasis for investment and training and this role should also be made clear to the public. If, however, such an option is unpalatable then serious thought must be given to fundamentally reimagining the Defence Force.

As the only significant expeditionary capability that the New Zealand government has to call upon, and as a professional force that constantly trains and maintains a state of readiness, the NZDF has become the 'jack of all trades'. In the recent past the NZDF has been used in an incredibly broad range of taskings. This places great strain on the NZDF, its people and its assets. Engagement in the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan highlighted how varied demands have been on the NZDF as an instrument of foreign policy.

Ostensibly deployed to Bamiyan in order to help facilitate reconstruction efforts, the NZDF was not used in engineering projects to build schools, wells and roads, but there were elements of war-fighting, intelligence gathering, support to the training of Afghan National Police, support to the governance elements of the region and engagement in a range of development, civil and humanitarian projects (more than 200 according to MFAT 2013). NZPolice were deployed behind the wire to train ANP, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs deployed a civilian to the province to head the Team late into the piece, but the overarching presence in Afghanistan was 'green'. Yet experiences in Afghanistan and, in particular, other less-hostile deployments, highlight that non-military agencies can, and should, play central roles in conflict and post-conflict settings, as well as in HADR or pandemic management or development or reconstruction roles.

The current overuse of the NZDF, however, does provide an opportunity to revisit just what the organisation's key roles and taskings are. If the key role is combat then this should be the main, almost sole, focus of the NZDF. In this case, the 'narrow option' emphasis could be on combat, deterrence and 'traditional' peacekeeping roles. In this case, those roles that do not fall primarily within the NZDF's jurisdiction then become taskings to which the NZDF may only play very limited supporting roles – such as in the provision of transport and security.

A more fundamental option is to consider whether or not the NZDF should become a 'constabulary force' as envisaged by Janowitz (1960). Is the core purpose of the NZDF more akin to emphasising a contribution to international security rather than national defence and being "continuously prepared to act, committed to the minimum use of force, and it has incorporated a protective military posture" (1960: 418)? If so, the NZDF's organisational structures and culture, as well as its recruitment, training and key performance indicators, would need to be overhauled.



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Whichever the case, part of such a redrawing of the NZDF's boundaries would require an increased investment in OGAs such as Police, Health, Customs, and MFAT. Alternatively it could require an increased interest in and engagement with NGO groupings. Some of this has begun to be explored in the new Security Handbook (2016), but this mode of thinking (and more particularly the investment in personnel, capabilities and structures) remains fledgling.

In terms of 'what should be done', then, a re-evaluation of the *raison d'être* of the NZDF alongside a re-evaluation of the roles, capabilities and strengths of other government agencies (OGAs) is urgently required. More commitment is needed to a deeper consideration as to how alternative agencies such as Police, Customs, Health, and Foreign Affairs might be better placed to contribute positively to foreign policy objectives in certain settings.²

Why does this matter to NZ?

An overreliance on the NZDF has a number of consequences. The first is for the organisation itself. Increased risk comes with taking on non-traditional taskings; risks from the potential to be underprepared for scenarios, risks to the broader strategic and foreign policy objectives at hand, risks to local populations, risks other personnel on the ground and risks to NZDF personnel who may be overwhelmed or overstretched by the roles they are expected to play. To this we can add the risk of militarising situations which do not require a military response.

This matters to NZ because, not only does the current situation stretch limited resources too thinly, but also because streamlining and working towards a more comprehensively cooperative approach across different sectors is in fact possible. In a country of four million people, a unitary form of government, small numbers of personnel who often have positive personal relationships with one another, the concept of a 'whole of New Zealand' response is indeed achievable in practice.

What should NZ do?

- Run whole of government exercises on a range of scenarios, not military-led nor military-centric, to ascertain where strengths and limits lie. This exercise should be conducted *without NZDF input* to ascertain where gaps exist and what options are best to fill those gaps. Here DPMC might constitute an appropriate lead agency.
- Decide if the core role of the NZDF is combat or constabulary in nature. Current information released to the public and current policy statements act to obfuscate the central purpose of the NZDF. Government and the NZDF itself may be risk averse to significant change, but New Zealand's likely greatest 'value add' lies in pursuing the latter rather than the former.
- From here a revision of sites for key infrastructure, equipment and other investments across government sectors that contribute to foreign policy is needed. Such a revision should take seriously the possibility of assigning expeditionary capabilities to other government agencies and / or to creating a form of civilian reserve.
- Clearly demarcate primacy of lead agencies in different sectors across different off shore scenarios. These scenarios could include categories such as: post-conflict (hostile); post-

² In addition to this, the relationship between 'NZinc' and the NGO community could similarly work more closely together where appropriate – but these limits need to be determined prior to issues emerging in operations. Finally, the role of private actors is an area that is particularly underresearched. These are not the key foci of this particular paper, but will be examined in later research.



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conflict (more permissive); post disaster response; humanitarian aid delivery; and pandemic response.

- Resource and restructure sectors accordingly.
- Consider non-governmental and private sector actors as potentially augmenting a government response (either directly or indirectly).
- Understand and respect the organisational and ethical limits of each agency whilst considering where additional cooperative ventures may yield exponentially successful results.

Conclusion

One of the key terms within the DWP 2016 with respect to the NZDF is 'flexibility'. Yet this concept could be more usefully applied to the security and development sector as a whole – **flexibility** might be better achieved by NOT utilising the NZDF in its current form to support foreign policy but rather calling upon others to undertake certain roles and with reimagining the central purpose of the NZDF within that context. Instead of 'going to war with the Army we have' then, there is a chance within a small developed country like New Zealand to be more inventive. This requires *a revisiting and redrawing of the core competencies and roles of the NZDF alongside those of OGA counterparts*, followed by a subsequent shift in resourcing and tasking of those agencies. If the NZDF's key focus is combat, then this needs to be made clear. If it is to be constabulary then this requires a rethinking of equipment, training and ethos. This cannot be done, however, without a rethinking of the purpose of foreign policy and a wide-ranging reconsideration as to how all of the different sectors within New Zealand contribute to that policy – thereby requiring a whole-of-government review.



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