

STRENGTHENING NEW ZEALAND'S COMMITMENT TO AN INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY

Mr Nicky Hager | Author | nicky@paradise.net.nz

Policy brief no. 4 | June 3, 2017

Presented at the conference: 'Small States and the Changing Global Order: New Zealand Faces the Future' at University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand, 3-4 June 2017

New Zealand's bi-partisan commitment to an independent, rules-based foreign policy clashes in practice with close participation in the Five Eyes alliance. Changes are needed to align military, intelligence and diplomatic activities with the overarching goal of an independent foreign policy.

Key findings

There is a disconnect between New Zealand's declared position as a independent and principled small nation, and various alliance-oriented activities of the military, intelligence agencies and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

New Zealand's historic position in a five-nation, Anglo-American military and intelligence alliance (Five Eyes) has a strong influence over New Zealand actions and policy, often to the detriment of an independent foreign policy.

The election of the Trump Administration provides a good time for New Zealand to rethink how closely it wants be aligned to the Five Eyes nations and to take steps to strengthen the independent foreign policy.

Executive summary

New Zealand is in the midst of a historic process of developing an independent foreign policy. Sixty years ago, New Zealand was still closely tied to Britain, a natural consequence of its colonial past. Thirty years ago, there was a growing self-perception of New Zealand as a principled and independent small nation; a nation that could have disproportionate influence internationally through its independent



This policy contradiction needs to be addressed.

The Five Eyes alliance is premised on the idea that the nations are "like minded" and have "shared values". In some respects this is correct. But as a small nation, committed to international law and



Five Eyes nations. This situation has been strained further during the last decade by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the New Zealand Defence Force working to integrate New Zealand more closely with the US military.

New Zealand is the least influential ally in the Five Eyes alliance, which reduces its ability to act independently. Independence implies that a country makes its own decisions according to its own values and priorities. But, as the earlier ANZUS membership showed, that is not the reality of junior ally status. The expectation of Five Eyes membership is that New Zealand will mostly conform with the allies and join their operations.

For the military, Five Eyes membership results in its equipment, training, doctrine and planning being determined primarily by the requirement to be interoperable with US-led coalition activities and by an assumption of willingness to be part of US and British-led wars. Since 2001 this has included a shift of priority from the Pacific to the Middle East and central Asia, joining wars that have destabilised those regions and beyond.

The intelligence agencies operate with less public oversight than the military and so have been less affected by the generational shift to a more independent foreign policy. Many intelligence activities



What should New Zealand do?

The best way to ensure alliance activities are in accord with an independent foreign policy is to define some clear limits to New Zealand's participation in the US-led alliance. This is necessary to ensure that the pressure of alliance expectations (which largely occurs beyond public and parliamentary view) does not trump the wish for a democratically determined, independent foreign policy.

The conditions placed on alliance membership should be based on several factors. The first is that New Zealand needs a more realistic assessment of how different the country is in values, outlook and interests from militarised big powers like the US and Britain. The second is recognition that the New Zealand military, intelligence agencies and diplomatic staff are very small compared to larger powers. Choices about priorities need to be made. The third is recognition that the "tithe" mentality can lead, incrementally, to each and every alliance activity being seen as in New Zealand's interests. That is why New Zealand priorities and bottom lines need to be identified first.

Some "bottom lines" of New Zealand Five Eyes cooperation should be:

- * No New Zealand military and intelligence operations in the Middle East and Central Asia
- * No signals New Zealand intelligence operations against South Pacific nations, the United Nations, South Pacific regional organisations and friendly governments.

This is not an ex

