



Headquarters
New Zealand Defence Force
Defence House
Private Bag 39997
Wellington Mail Centre
Lower Hutt 5045
New Zealand

OIA-2026-5872

4th August 2026

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

I refer to your email of 13 July 2026 requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA), the '*new Military Strategy*' referenced in the response to you dated 18 June 2026 (OIA-2026-5809).

The New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) Military Strategy provides particular detail on NZDF military priorities to achieve policy objectives. It is therefore withheld in full in accordance with section 6(a) of the OIA. Enclosed is a summary document that was prepared in parallel for general NZDF use. Where indicated information is withheld for the reason explained above in accordance with section 6(a) of the OIA.

You have the right, under section 28(3) of the OIA, to ask an Ombudsman to review this response to your request. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Please note that responses to official information requests are proactively released where possible. This response to your request will be published shortly on the NZDF website, with your personal information removed.

Yours sincerely

GA Motley
Brigadier
Chief of Staff HQNZDF

Enclosure:

1. Military Strategy Overview 2026

MILITARY STRATEGY

OVERVIEW 2026



Derived from and nested within Defence strategic direction and guidance, the Military Strategy is the NZDF's capstone guidance document.

Defence staff supporting planning and execution of this Strategy and individual OAI are to ensure that information and data is appropriately classified and protected with suitable controls commensurate with its level of sensitivity and/or classification.

Introduction

The Military Strategy sets out how the NZDF will implement Government policy. This version is designed to inform and guide NZDF personnel and system preparedness for a range of s. 6(a) NZDF’s operations, activities and investments (OAI) for delivering military effects to achieve the defence policy objectives directed by Government.

The Military Strategy is held at a higher classification. This s. 6(a) version is an overview, for information only, and is not the prime reference.

Purpose

The Military Strategy provides coherent strategic direction to deter malign actors from undermining New Zealand and the Realm States and their vital interests.

The Military Strategy has been designed with a 15-year horizon, aligned with the *Defence Capability Plan 25* (DCP25). The strategy will be reviewed every two years to inform future DCP processes or when discrete events dictate.

s. 6(a)

The NZDF must be prepared to operate independently, collaboratively as an integrated force, or in a combined joint force with our ally, Five Eyes and other partners. This must be coordinated and synchronised across the maritime, land, air, space, and cyber/electromagnetic spectrum domains; and through the physical, human, and information environments.

Policy and strategy	National Security Strategy			
	Strategic Defence Policy			
	Military Strategy			
	International Defence Engagement Strategy	Defence Industry Strategy	NZDF Organisational Strategy	Integrated Investment Plan

s. 6(a)

Figure 1: New Zealand’s defence document hierarchy.

Part 1: Situation

Rising competition and tensions in the wider Indo-Pacific are playing out in New Zealand's immediate region. Actors are seeking to undermine international rules and norms and to reshape them in ways counter to New Zealand's values and interests. New Zealand faces direct challenges to its security interests in the Pacific, and defence activities are a critical element of New Zealand's response.

s. 6(a)



Climate change and environmental challenges in the Pacific compound other regional security challenges and put pressure on Pacific governments. These vulnerabilities pose threats to New Zealand's security by creating opportunities for actors whose interests do not align with those of New Zealand.

Transnational Serious Organised Crime (TSOC) groups will increasingly impact, and be impacted by, other national security issues. It is almost certain TSOC groups intend to grow their network capabilities and knowledge base, remaining resilient and adaptable to disruption.

New Zealand's geographic remoteness does not shelter it from threats. Extended maritime communications and supply chains are vulnerable. Cyber intrusions, not subject to the restrictions of geography, are ongoing and persistent. Strategic competitors' expeditionary capabilities are making the NZDF operational space more congested and contested. New technologies and capabilities are driving rapid change, increasing the potential of surprise or overmatch by an adversary; requiring a more capable and integrated NZDF.

Part 2: Our Position in the World

Global

New Zealand is a geographically isolated trading nation, reliant on the International Rules Based System (IRBS) for its national security. The system has afforded New Zealand the protection and support of multilateral architectures, institutions and collective arrangements, supporting New Zealand's broad access to global markets. The IRBS has disciplined states' exercise of national power through a complex arrangement of international law, rules, custom, conventions and norms of behaviour. The sovereign equality of states has supported stability and provided safeguards, albeit imperfect, against coercion, confrontation and conflict. Defence activities provide an important element of New Zealand's overall contribution to the IRBS.

A geopolitical shift from 'rules to power' means rules are more contested and relative power between states assumes a greater role in shaping international affairs. As progressing New Zealand's interests becomes more difficult, it will be critical to work with partners. s. 6(a)

The Five Eye (FVEY) partnership is a grouping of nations that shares our fundamental values and interests. The NZDF derives significant benefit from this partnership, including access to defence capabilities, information technologies and military developments that would be otherwise unachievable. Regular exercises and deployments with our partners enable the NZDF to gain high value military experience, not achievable independently. New Zealand has and will continue to work with partners beyond the Pacific, building capability to ensure our forces continue to be relevant, interoperable and trusted.

s. 6(a)

Pacific

The New Zealand Government emphasises the critical and non-discretionary importance of ensuring the security of our immediate region, which spans from Antarctica into the Pacific; and our constitutional obligations for defence and security of the Realm. In addition to continuing to contribute to regional stability and security, we must now act more deliberately and urgently to maintain a favourable regional strategic balance. We must work with partners to prevent malign actors' efforts to build regional presence and influence. We must reinforce and encourage nations with similar values to work towards a prosperous and stable region.

Antarctica

The Ross Dependency is part of the Realm of New Zealand over which New Zealand maintains a right of sovereignty. We participate in a broad range of cooperative regional commitments, including scientific support and SAR, meteorological and hydrographic survey. NZDF supports New Zealand's scientific research at Scott Base and is part of the Joint Logistics Pool comprising New Zealand, United States and Italy.

Strategic interest in the Southern Ocean and Antarctica is also growing. The Antarctic Treaty System continues to provide the framework for state activity, but it is increasingly coming under pressure. It is clear that the Antarctic region is not immune to strategic competition.

Operating Areas

Figure 2 illustrates New Zealand's primary, secondary, and tertiary operating areas. The operating areas describe geographical areas to guide prioritisation and decision making. The primary operating area is the focus for NZDF OAI, encompassing New Zealand's principal area of military interest: the South West Pacific region and all New Zealand sovereign territory, including our sovereign claim in the Ross Dependency.

The secondary operating area is vital to the operation of New Zealand's economy. The area encompasses the Indian Ocean, India, maritime and mainland Southeast Asia bordering the Pacific.

The tertiary operating area is the NZDF's area of global contribution and influence

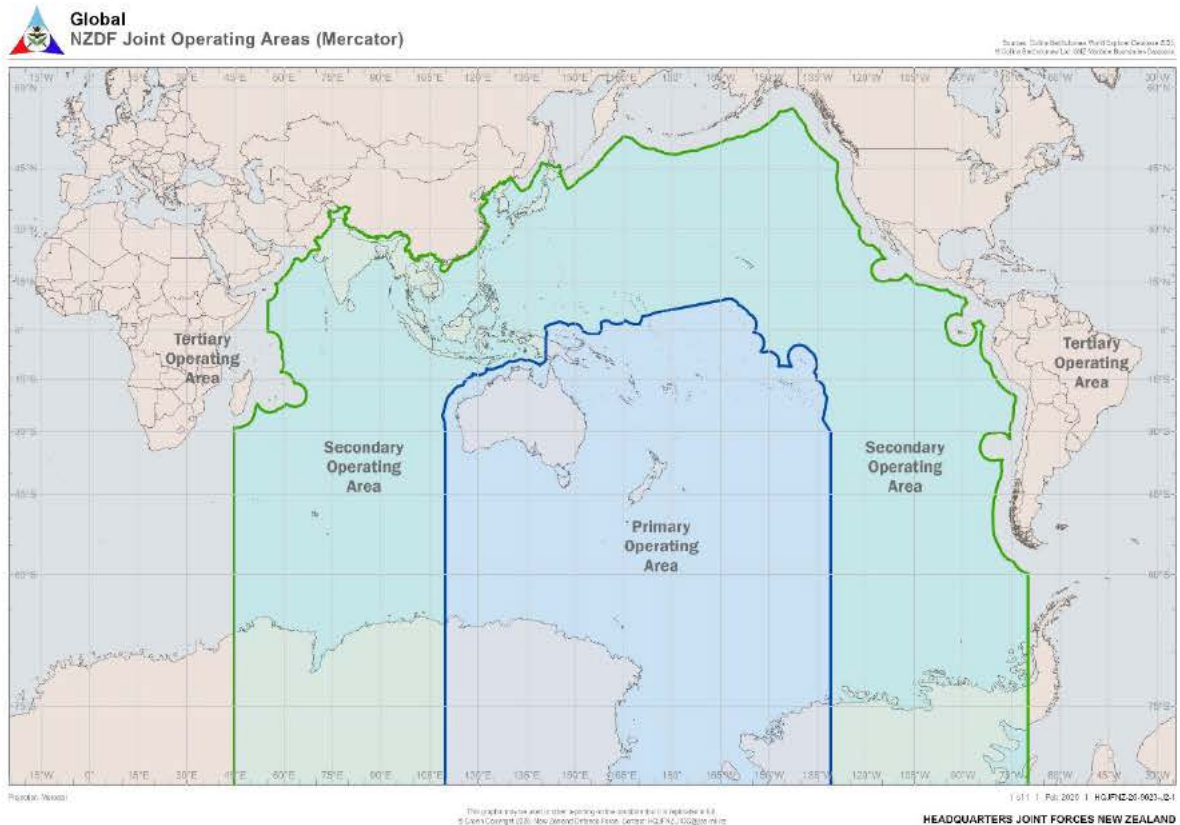


Figure 2: New Zealand's Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Operating Areas.

Part 3: Military Strategic Objectives

Deterrence Theory

Deterrence is the practice - typically by a state - of influencing the decision making of an actor by signalling greater costs and/or reduced benefits of undertaking unwanted activity. Deterrence seeks to discourage or restrain an adversary from acting in ways that are contrary to a state's interests.

There are three broad approaches to deterrence:

1. The actor has sufficient capability to bring to bear to support the deterrence approach;
2. The actor communicates, or the adversary is otherwise aware of, the adversary actions that would engage the deterrence approach; and
3. The deterrence approach is sufficiently credible, and the actor is willing to undertake necessary actions to deliver the deterrence approach.

CENTRAL IDEA

Deter through denial of opportunity by employing an integrated and independently capable force
s. 6(a)

The NZDF's Military Strategic Objectives (MSOs) relate to campaigns and operations at home, in the South West Pacific, and globally to achieve the defence policy objectives directed by Government.

MSO 1: Defend the realm of New Zealand and its vital interests

The world is becoming less stable. Global and regional tensions have created security uncertainty within the Indo-Pacific. Great power competition has the potential to cause conflict which could spill over into the Pacific.

s. 6(a)

MSO 2: Enhance freedom of action in the Pacific

s. 6(a)

. The MSO focuses on NZDF actions that reduce the likelihood of regional instability by providing forewarning of threats and assisting in building the theatre framework for primary and secondary operating areas.

MSO 3: s. 6(a)

MSO 4: Support Pacific Island states' sovereignty, security, and resilience

An all of government approach will be used to support this MSO. Pacific Island states are responsible for ensuring their own sovereignty, security, and resilience. The NZDF will support them in these endeavours. This can be done in a variety of ways, including by providing ISR of the nation's EEZ or providing intelligence that aids disruption to TOC or other threats. NZDF personnel should meet PIC requests for support with security training, mentoring and should consider expanding existing commitments, to deny adversaries opportunities to influence.

The NZDF is in a unique position of sharing a cultural heritage with the Pacific Islands. Efforts should be made to build on these foundations to ensure the NZDF maintains its understanding, influence and access in the region. These can only be achieved through person-to-person relationships and an increased exposure to NZDF personnel.

MSO 5: Protect NZDF personnel, materiel, infrastructure, information, and decision space

The NZDF will preserve its core and enabling functions so it can deter and respond to threats within its POA. This MSO supports freedom of action and enables force projection and AoG activities within the immediate region.

MSO 6: Increase co-operation with the ADF

Australia is New Zealand's only formal defence ally and New Zealand's most important international partner. The NZDF and ADF will continue to work together across the span of defence and security activities to promote shared interests and grow force interoperability and integration to operationalise the alliance.

MSO 7: Contribute to multinational military and security missions to support the International Rules-Based System

NZDF contributions to UN and other multilateral organisations, multi-national and multi-agency missions will be optimised to enhance engagement with our ally and other partners. This will support the UN, gain support for New Zealand, and reinforce the value of the IRBS with domestic and international audiences.

Approach

The NZDF will achieve its mission and MSOs through a strategy-led approach with our ally and partners across three Lines of Effort (LOEs):

LOE1

Deter malign influence in the POA through targeted operations, activities, and investments.

The NZDF will deter by leveraging New Zealand's advantages of location, agility, and relationships through influence and diplomacy actions that generate military effect.

LOE2

Prepare for crisis and conflict operations.

The NZDF will have the capability to conduct multi-domain crisis and conflict operations. There is heightened urgency driven by increasing threats in the security environment, and the NZDF must rapidly increase the readiness of its military capabilities and ability to sustain operations **S. 6(a)**. Preparation of credible military capabilities requires consideration and balance across force modernisation, force generation, readiness and sustainment, and current roles and missions.

LOE3

Contribute to collective security, including through the delivery of a range of security activities including maritime security, stability operations and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), higher end military contingencies and providing support to the maintenance of a stable IRBS.

The NZDF must demonstrate New Zealand's capability and willingness to oppose interests that work against New Zealand's security through demonstrating multi-domain military abilities, and confidence building activities.

Conclusion

s. 6(a)

. Achieving the three prioritised LOEs will require planners to consider interoperability and integration within the NZDF, across all levers of national power, with our ally Australia, and with Five Eyes and other partners.

To meet the expectations of the Government, the New Zealand public, Australia and our close partners, and to uphold our constitutional obligations towards the Realm countries (Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau), the following effects and capabilities must be delivered by the NZDF:

Force projection: the NZDF needs to be able to project force to deter adversaries and respond to crises in our region and defend the Realm countries.

Maintain persistent situational awareness: In our EEZ, the South Pacific and Southern Ocean: a range of capabilities must be available to ensure that the NZDF has persistent awareness of New Zealand's EEZ, the South Pacific, the Southern Ocean and the Ross Dependency.

Deter through denial of opportunity: The NZDF alongside our Pacific and other international partners and as part of a whole-of-government approach, should act to address existing and emerging regional challenges. This will serve to deny opportunities for actors that seek to challenge the existing regional strategic balance and undermine our shared security in the Pacific.

Sustain combat operations concurrently: s. 6(a)

Contribute to national defence and help deliver whole-of-government security objectives: This includes assisting other agencies to detect and respond to transnational organised crime in our immediate region, including the Realm countries; by responding to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, narcotics and people smuggling; undertaking search and rescue, and providing other domestic support, including in response to disaster relief, counter-terrorism, and explosives disposal.

In order to implement Government policy in an increasingly complex operating environment, the NZDF must be a proactive, multi-domain combat force. Innovative ways to concurrently employ the force and generate capability must be pursued.

