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OIA-2026-5981

30th October 2026

[redacted]

Dear [redacted]

I refer to your email of 11 September 2026 requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA):

1) *The latest approved version of the New Zealand Army Future Fighting Concept referred to in the May 2025 Land Domain industry presentation. If a later substantive draft exists, please also provide the latest version of that draft.*

Enclosed is a copy of the latest version of the New Zealand Army's Future Fighting Concept. This document outlines the intent to inform the design and purpose of the New Zealand Army's future combat force, and that context is described in more detail in the preface. Certain elements of the document have been withheld under section 6(a) of the OIA, as revealing military capabilities would be likely to prejudice the security or defence of New Zealand, and section 6(b)(i) of the OIA, to uphold the entrusting of information to the Government of New Zealand on a basis of confidence by the Government or government agency of another country. The New Zealand Defence Force's internal email address is withheld in accordance with section 9(2)(k) to avoid the malicious use of staff information, such as phishing, scams or unsolicited advertising.

2) *Any substantive papers, options analyses or decision records produced since 1 January 2024 showing:*

- *how the Future Fighting Concept has informed the requirements or options for Future Manoeuvre Systems, including the future of the NZLAV capability; and*
- *how this work relates to, supersedes or replaces the follow-on phase of the Protected Mobility Capability Project previously intended to consider upgrade or replacement of the LAV fleet.*

Future indicative investments for the period between 2029-2039 for the light armoured vehicle capability are considered in the 2025 Defence Capability Plan (see page 29)[1]. This work is currently at an early stage, and subject to funding decisions made by the Cabinet; therefore, there are no relevant documents within the scope of this part of your request. It is refused under section 18(e) of the OIA.

[1] https://www.defence.govt.nz/publications/2025-defence-capability-plan/

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. Future Fighting Concept

NGĀTI TŪMATAUENGA
NZARMY



FUTURE FIGHTING CONCEPT

Version 1.0

AUTHORISATION

New Zealand's Future Fighting Concepts are developed and maintained by Army General Staff, New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF). Comments on factual accuracy or proposals for amendment should be directed to the Assistant Chief of Army (Strategy) at:

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PREFACE

As we approach the next decade, the landscape of warfare is poised for a transformative change driven by rapid advancements in technology beyond those we have seen emerge in recent conflicts, shifts in global power dynamics, and evolving threats. The Future Fighting Concept aims to define the principles of future combat, integrating multi-domain effects, innovations in Artificial Intelligence (AI), autonomous systems, robotics, cyber capabilities, and network-centric operations for Ngāti Tūmatauenga, the NZ Army.

The character of warfare is evolving. In the future, the NZ Army will need to adapt to an increasingly complex and transparent battlefield, where traditional notions of conflict are challenged by hybrid methods of warfare. The integration of autonomous systems, enhanced soldier capabilities, and real-time data analytics will empower military leaders to make informed decisions swiftly, ensuring operational superiority in diverse environments. However, the proliferation of advanced technologies at pace such as cheap ubiquitous ISR and strike capabilities are impacting tactical signatures and are rendering equipment and tactics obsolete at a pace that most modern militaries cannot keep up with.

The intention of this document is to articulate the themes of the NZ Army's Future Fighting Concept and is to be applied when considering the design and purpose of our Future Combat Force. This document is deliberately UNCLASSIFIED and so should be read with amplification of the geostrategic context represented in the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) Military Strategy and HQ JFNZ Joint Campaign Plan. The key characteristics of our Future Combat Force system put forward in this document are the need for:

- adaptive and rapid force projection.
- coherence of system.
- increased human survivability.
- combat mass and lethality.
- inherently joint and interoperable by nature
- the necessity to accelerate technological advancement.

The key Functions of the Future Fighting Concept are to:

- Provide the conceptual aiming points to be achieved through resourcing and synchronisation that will be detailed in The Army Plan.
- Inform capability requirements.
- Guide the transformation of Army to be a multi-domain capable, rapidly deployable, highly adaptive, and resilient combat force that is expert in the Indo-Pacific and globally capable in an increasingly complex and technology-driven battlefield.
- Communicate, at a conceptual level, how the future land force anticipates operating in conjunction with the other NZDF domains, in a Joint, or coalition Force, in particular with our ally Australia.
- Informing future Defence Assessments, Defence Capability Plans and Defence White Papers.

METHOD

The Future Fighting Concept has been generated through analysis and assessment by the Directorate of Strategic Concepts (DSC), Army General Staff (AGS). Horizon scanning has been used in conjunction with wide-ranging literature reviews, New Zealand defence and intelligence assessments, input from subject matter experts, and a broad scan of the United States, British, Canadian and Australian Armies future environmental and capability statements. Horizon scanning is a methodology which searches for future and upcoming technology trends and assesses the opportunities and threats these trends may present by flagging breakthroughs and innovation across the Science and Technology (S&T) spectrum, with a research focus that can be as broad or as narrow as required, and that can extend beyond S&T. Primary references are identified at the end of this document.

The Future Fighting Concept guides the application and implementation of the New Zealand Army Robotics and Autonomous Systems (RAS) Concept.

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INTRODUCTION

New Zealand's Geo-Strategic Environment



In an increasingly complex international environment characterised by shifting power dynamics, rising geopolitical tensions, and rapid technology advancements, New Zealand finds itself at a pivotal intersection of opportunity and challenge. New Zealand is facing its most challenging and dangerous strategic environment in decades.[1] The Indo-Pacific region has become a focal point of international security concerns with its geopolitical complexity potentially influencing and impacting New Zealand's strategic environment and national interests. As traditional geographic protection diminishes, New Zealand's strategic vulnerability stems from its reliance on open trade routes, maritime corridors, and both commercial and military lines of communications – assets that adversaries can now target through cyber disruptions, maritime interdiction, or asymmetric campaigns. New Zealand must navigate this volatile environment with a nuanced approach.

Rising tensions in the Indo-Pacific are increasingly characterised from the People's Republic of China (PRC) actions which have shifted from mere assertion to active confrontation.[2] An increasingly powerful PRC 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.[3] Increasingly, our adversaries have displayed a willingness to use military force to coerce their neighbours to suit their own interests.[4] In addition to expanding their conventional forces and capabilities, these threats are also rapidly advancing their space, cyber, electronic warfare, and information capabilities. Simultaneously, the rapid diffusion of technology and increased collaboration between our adversaries has lowered the barriers of entry for other states to engage in aggressive behaviour and led to a proliferation of low-cost, kinetic, and non-kinetic capabilities globally.[5]

[1] New Zealand Government, 2025. *Defence Capability Plan.* Chapter 1: Strategic Environment. 2025.
[2] Bautista, L. 2024. *Rising Tensions in the South China Sea: The Strategic Calculations at Play*. Australian Institute of International Affairs.
[3] New Zealand Government, 2023. *New Zealand Defence Policy and Security Statement*. 2023.
[4] ABCANZ, 2025. *American, British, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Armies' Program: Strategy 2035.* 2nd Edition, 2025.
[5] Ibid.



To add to this complexity, the character of warfare is undergoing a profound transformation with the introduction of advanced technologies, marking a significant shift to how conflicts are fought and managed. The primary change, enabled by new technologies, is the increased transparency and predictive modelling of the battlefield, i.e. significantly enhanced situational awareness coupled with AI predictions allows increased speed of decision-making and combined with precision weaponry facilitates increased lethality. As has been witnessed in Ukraine/Russia conflict the ubiquitous presence of drones on the battlefield has resulted in a stalemate, highlighting the urgent need for innovative tactics; however, as new technologies continue to emerge, similar challenges are likely to arise until effective solutions are developed to address their inherent vulnerabilities. Also, as new technologies become more accessible in the future, they will level the playing field, allowing smaller states or insurgent groups to confront conventional military forces more effectively.

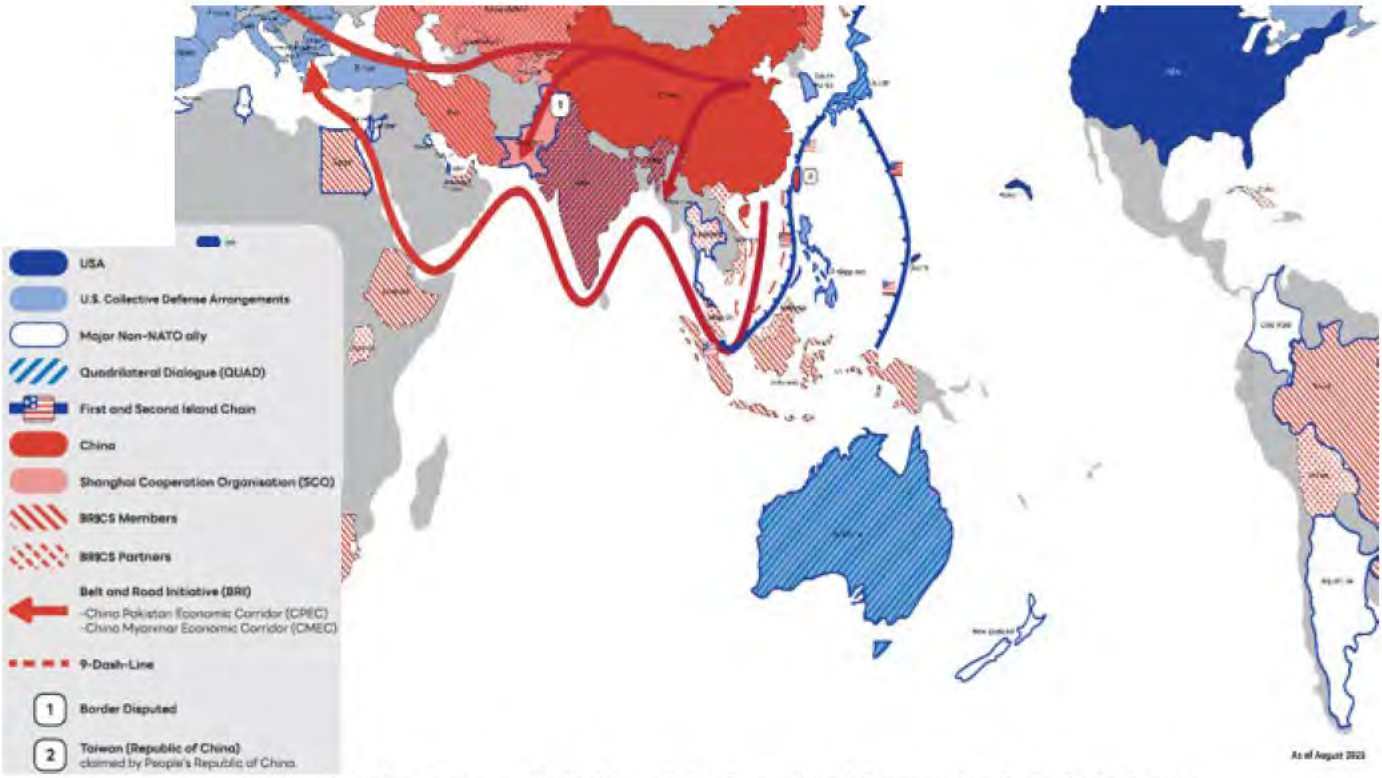


Figure 1: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2024. Map of the Geopolitical Competition in the Indo-Pacific.

Global competition and the use of emergent technologies drive the need for the modernization of militaries and the establishment of new standards for interoperability.[6] For New Zealand, this will be achieved in collaboration with our ally and strategic partners. New Zealand has an alliance with Australia (AUS), is a member of the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) with AUS, Malaysia, Singapore, and the United Kingdom, has strong working relationships with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), a grouping of AUS, the United States of America (USA), India, and Japan aimed at promoting security and stability, and is part of ABCANZ armies a program aimed at optimising interoperability and standardisation. These relationships will be critical to support New Zealand protecting its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and realm countries from the threats that will arise from increased strategic competition between near-peer adversaries.

[6] Ibid.

CHAPTER 1

The Future Operating Concept – Meeting Tomorrow's Need

Future Land Operations – Who We Fight With – Characteristics of the Future Force



The future operating environment will be increasingly interconnected, lethal, autonomous, and both contested and congested. It is in this environment that Ngāti Tūmatauenga, the NZ Army, will be expected to operate with a high degree of concurrency and in complex terrain within the Indo-Pacific. It will span multiple domains, through which technological advantage will simultaneously be a critical capability and critical vulnerability. Malign activity in the grey-zone and climate change will intensify levels of geopolitical uncertainty and strategic tension across the globe, including in the Indo-Pacific. The effectiveness and stability of the liberal rules-based system are being undermined. Both the use, and threat of use, of military power are increasingly shaping states' interactions.[7] The geographical isolation and degree of discretion New Zealand's enjoyed over previous decades has consequently diminished, driving an urgent need to align concepts and capabilities for the challenges of our future environment. These factors drive a baseline strategic environment of heightened competition across the globe, where protracted periods of crisis and conflict will test the strength of alliances and partnership. The Future Combat Force must be purposed primarily towards protecting national sovereignty and maintaining the international rules-based system – it must be credibly capable of delivering decisive effects on and from land, contributing operational cross-domain effects and supporting Deterrence through Denial, with both defensive and offensive capability.

Future Land Operations

The Future Combat Force will conduct future operations under the philosophical foundations of the Manoeuvrist Approach and Mission Command, based on using an indirect method to defeat an adversary's will to fight and negating their strategy through intelligent and creative application of effects against critical vulnerabilities[8].

The Future Combat Force must be capable of delivering decisive effects in the land domain, as armies always have done, and it must also be a critical contributor of effects in support of multi-domain operations - the Future Combat Force will fight on the land and from the land.

Future land operations are s 6(b)(i) being:

- Preparatory shaping operations.
- Combat operations.
- Peacetime military operations.
- Peace operations.
- Stability/support operations, protection operations.
- Defence Assistance to the Civil Community, and Humanitarian Assistance; and
- Disaster relief operations.

[7] New Zealand Government, 2023. *Defence Policy and Strategy Statement.* 2023.
[8] NZDDP-D, 2017 *Manoeuvre* Page 50. Forth Addition, 2017.
[9] s 6(b)(i)

Through competition to conflict, decisive results in the land domain will require the Future Combat Force to be premised on close combat, multi-domain enablement and integrated as part of a NZDF Joint or Coalition Force, most likely with our ally, AUS. The following amplification of the ADF land power in operations is provided for the context of this Future Fighting Concept (FFC).



Combat Operations.

The application of sanctioned violence through close combat on land will be essential to achieving decisive strategic, operational, and tactical objectives. s 6(a) The ranges at which traditional close combat is conducted will extend with the ubiquity and lethality of robotic and autonomous systems. Operational concepts must rapidly evolve to incorporate ubiquitous use of robotic and autonomous systems in combat to increase survivability and lethality, whilst retaining an ethical approach and where there needs to be a human in the loop. Where at all possible, we must seek to put 'steel before blood.'

Stabilisation Operations.

Land stabilisation operations seek to influence, support, protect, or evacuate populations prior, during or after political and social unrest, violence, or disaster. In a period of heightened strategic tension, land stabilisation operations must consider the likelihood that malign intent is at play. This likelihood reinforces the need for a Future Combat Force that

can balance the humanitarian needs of populations and threats that arise from opportunity, with those hardline and potentially state-sponsored actors. Future land stabilisation operations will necessitate a rapid decisive response to bring emergency relief to situations so that forces are committed for the least amount of time before handover to other government agencies, to enable the Future Combat Force to quickly reorientate back to threats against the international rules-based system.



Deterrence by Denial of Opportunity.

Central to meeting the challenges inherent in a period of heightened strategic competition, or during crisis or conflict, is the need for the Future Combat Force to be both a contributor to, and for, credible deterrence. Deterrence operations in the NZ context are focused on the denial of opportunity, which necessitates focus and scaling through a spectrum from 'deterrence-through-influence' to 'deterrence-through-capability.' Whilst capabilities that will underpin deterrence operations could offer operational utility in any theatre; this concept is Indo-Pacific centric. Deterrence-through-influence is heavily vested in being a regional partner of choice, to the point that it requires an unpalatable degree of resource investment for an adversary to break the cultural relationship. Whilst 'Kiwi' culture is foundational to this approach, it must be strengthened through authentic persistent partner-centric engagement. Deterrence-through-capability is vested in the ability and intent to deliver a disproportionate effect relative to the perceived gains.

The Future Combat Force will require both conventional and Special Forces capabilities capable of delivering a deterrent effect as part of wider NZDF and coalition systems. The FFC conceptualises a comprehensive operational framework that will leverage credible deterrence, technological superiority, and persistent engagement to deny adversaries the benefits of aggression in the future. Capabilities must pose a genuine threat to an

adversary's critical capabilities, which in turn will require scale, proven systems, intent to execute operations as thresholds are met, and the agility and readiness states to achieve positional advantage from which to present the deterrent. s 6(a) [10] Such visible positioning, reinforced by swift mobilisation and response mechanisms, creates a psychological barrier – an expectation that any hostile act will be met with immediate and detrimental consequences. This deterrence-through-denial posture aims to discourage aggression before it occurs, shifting the initiative from reactive defence to one of proactive denial.

Should the strategic environment shift from competition to crisis or conflict, the Future Combat Force will enhance New Zealand's ability to project and influence beyond its borders and enable the establishment and maintenance of deterrence zones – areas where adversaries cannot operate freely without risking significant consequences. s 6(a) the Future Combat Force aims to deny adversaries the strategic and operational advantages they seek. This approach exemplifies a modern, adaptable, and technologically integrated strategy designed to project and influence beyond our borders, protect sovereignty, and uphold peace through the credible denial of hostile actions.

Who We Will Fight With

The Future Combat Force must continue to provide the NZ Government with Military Response Options (MROs) that enable sovereign policy choices for either independent or the integrated application of military power. The Future Combat Force must be able to respond and sustain concurrent challenges on land at home, in the region and globally, and be capable of rapidly transitioning tactical forces from one paradigm to the other. Independent or integrated, the Future Combat Force must be capable of both, across the spectrum of competition and future land operations.

To enable to a full range of sovereign choices, the Future Combat Force must be inherently capable of integrating with the NZ Joint or Coalition Force.

[10] s 6(b)(i)



NZ-Led Operations

This will require the Future Combat Force to be capable of leading Joint and Coalition land responses at home and regionally as either an independently sustained deployment or independently capable and responsible for an Area of Operations (AO). In both scenarios most, or all, of the force will be constituted from the NZ Army, with supplementary elements from the other Services or partner nations assigned at a tactical status of command below Full Command. In periods of strategic competition or crisis, NZ-Led operations will be conducted at the low intensity end of the spectrum, whilst in time of strategic conflict, the Future Combat Force must be prepared to act and lead as an independently capable force responsible for an AO within the coalition.

Independent capacity of the Future Combat Force ensures it can operate in certain circumstances without reliance on other nations, although operational and strategic enablement from the NZ Joint Force is an essential premise. As such, the Future Combat Force must include the organic capacity and capabilities that would generally be held at higher echelons in an integrated operation, so that it is multi-domain enabled, provide assurance, and be able to command and sustain operations.

With our Ally, Australia

When integrated with our ally AUS, the Future Combat Force must offer a credible contribution s 6(a) .



Pacific Partners

As a force of and from the Pacific, the Future Combat Force must deeply understand its environment and culture. It must forge authentic, enduring relationships with our Pacific partners—relationships resilient enough to withstand adversity. Strong people-to-people ties, and professional military trust will underpin the integration of Pacific partners into a New Zealand-led force, capable of conducting both stabilisation and combat operations. Leadership of the Pacific Small Armies Forum (PSAF) will further strengthen collective cohesion, interoperability and regional security outcomes.

Characteristics of the Future Force

A Combat System of Scale

The Future Combat Force must prioritise the requirement to deliver sustained sanctioned violence through combat effects, both as a deterrent and to maximise the likelihood of strategic success in crisis and conflict. The evolving character of warfare necessitates the combat orientation that is more lethal and more survivable. Whether operating in strategic competition, crisis or conflict, the Future Combat Force must be of, and operate at, a scale that provides sovereign choice and assurance, high levels of concurrency, the ability to coordinate multi-domain effects, and ultimately deliver decisive outcomes on land. The ability to deliver decisive effects on land, the scale of the Future Combat Force and Units of Action must be underpinned by both adversarial and partner centric considerations under heightened levels of strategic competition.



In strategic competition, independent operations and engagement with our partners will require high levels of concurrency and disbursement to generate persistent 'deterrence-through-denial of opportunity' effects. s. 6(a) . Units of Action should be adaptable, agile, and technologically advanced. The ability to manoeuvre in combat, to move while in direct contact to exploit opportunities or to break contact if becoming overwhelmed, is an important survival success capability. As our ally AUS, and other ABCANZ partners adjust the scale of their respective Unit of Actions in response to the heightened levels of strategic competition[11], the Future Combat Force must also be appropriately scaled to remain capable of integrating a credible contribution to a coalition, at a scale that it is capable of sovereign assurance.

[11] s 6(b)(i)

Should strategic calculus be tested and the strategic environment shift to crisis or conflict, the Future Combat Force will need to rapidly concentrate force to pre-empt or defeat adversarial action throughout the Indo-Pacific. In this scenario, the Future Combat Force must be capable of both independent and integrated action s 6(a) . As heightened levels of strategic competition permeate the Indo-Pacific threatening the discretion and isolation NZ has enjoyed, the Future Combat Force must be prepared to meet the challenges to the international rules-based system with a maximum effort contribution, forward deployments, whilst concurrently defending New Zealand territory.

Rapidly Deployable

The need for dispersed operations and engagements throughout the Indo-Pacific, necessitates the Future Combat Force be, by design, rapidly deployable. s 6(a) [12]. Owing to the heightened levels of strategic competition, pervasive malign grey-zone activity s 6(a) the Future Combat Force must be able to respond or secure positional advantage in the Pacific rapidly that mitigates long lines of communications s 6(a) . Being rapidly deployable will enable the Future Combat Force to either pre-empt adversarial action, generate the combat mass necessary to achieve decisive outcomes on land, or to contribute multi-domain effects. s 6(a)

Rapid deployment must be considered against the timeliness of a response to strategic indicators and warnings being initiated to the time the desired effect must be operational. s 6(a) .

[12] s 6(b)(i)



Agile

We are transforming into an adaptive, rapidly deployable, multi-domain capable force that will deliver persistent, decisive effects on and from the land. If called to fight tomorrow, we must project combat power quickly, decisively, and without excuse. Being inherently agile will maximise the Future Combat Force's utility to New Zealand through the ability to repeatedly deploy, redeploy and sustain task organised forces for independent and integrated operations, across the spectrum of conflict, at short notice. Our agility will be underpinned by a culture of 'always operating,' system coherence, simplicity, and innovation. As a combat orientated system of systems, the Future Combat Force will be empowered to fight smarter, move faster, and strike harder as it delivers decisive effects on land and contributes to the multi-domain fight from the land. An agile Future Combat Force will offer the utility and responsiveness necessary for the evolving strategic environment.

Indo-Pacific Experts, Globally Capable

Land domain mastery is foundational to the operational success of any land force, and the Future Combat Force will be defined by its expertise in operating within the unique Indo-Pacific environment—our Primary and Secondary Areas of Operations[13]. Complex terrain will be our strength, and our people must be skilled in surviving, moving, and fighting in it – hardened and resilient to be survivable. To achieve this, the Future Combat Force will harness the innate conditioning of the New Zealand soldier — shaped by upbringing and training in rugged bush, alpine, and archipelagic environments — and further strengthened by the cultural identity and warrior ethos of Ngāti Tūmatauenga. Our soldiers serve as a

[13] s 6(a)

cornerstone of land domain mastery. We will combine our warrior ethos with emerging technologies to generate lethal, sustainable, and decisive combat effects on the land, and contribute to the multi-domain fight from the land.



Whilst being a force of and from the Southwest Pacific, enriched by learning from our Pacific partners, all warfighting functions must gain lived experience in austere conditions, with particular focus on littoral, jungle, and urban terrain. The Future Combat Force must also retain the ability to offer credible Military Response Options beyond our core AO. This FFC recognises that preparedness and readiness to be committed beyond the Indo-Pacific may necessitate increased response times, targeted skill gap closure and mission-specific rehearsals, and bespoke capabilities.

Posture, Presence, Persistence

The Future Combat Force will use posture, presence, and persistence to support deterrence-through-denial of opportunity and as a means of strengthening our relationships with key partners, particularly those in the Indo-Pacific. Across the spectrum of strategic competition, Future Combat Force units of action will predominantly contribute to this through the provision of dispersed persistent presence throughout the Indo-Pacific. s 6(a) Whilst posture, presence and persistence is achieved as a land force task, it requires capability consideration to support the force on land (such as infrastructure and stocks), as well as those that will deploy and redeploy the force.

A critical outcome of this concept is that authentic, enduring person-to-person relationships are forged with our key partners throughout the Indo-Pacific. The Future Combat Force is a people centric land force from and of the Pacific – success on land operations is founded on soldiers and leaders who live the Army ethos and values, who can quickly understand their surroundings and the cultural context, and who can build and sustain authentic relationships within a coalition and operational environments.



Persistence is an enduring characteristic of land power. The Future Combat Force must contribute to this by enabling persistent control and sustained influence on or from the land throughout an operation. Resilience, sustainment, cultural awareness, and authentic relationships will underpin the Future Combat Force's ability to be persistent.

Adaptive

The Future Combat Force must embrace a dynamic and iterative approach to Force Design. This will necessitate a paradigm shift to a model of frequent and dynamic Force Design iterations that prioritise agility, the generation of mass and lethality, and enable continuous, persistent operations. Iterative evolution must be informed by doctrinal developments of our partners and experimentation, and be Plan ANZAC aligned, thereby enabling the NZ Army to remain responsive for joint, interagency, and multinational operations. The cultural foundation of this transformation lies in fostering an adaptive mindset that values innovation and mission success over traditional regimental frameworks.

To fully realise the potential of the Future Combat Force, garrison structures must evolve to support agile, scalable, and responsive outputs. A reimagined garrison approach that leverages the foundation of a modernised army training capability will enable the Future Combat Force to raise, train, sustain and operate cohesively and effectively. By aligning structure with the evolving strategic environment, the Future Combat Force will be better positioned to meet the demands of future warfare.



Sustainable

The Future Combat Force must be prepared to operate in a contested and congested logistics environment, where coalition support cannot be guaranteed, and supply chains are vulnerable. New Zealand's strategic partnerships—particularly with Australia—will enhance interoperability and resilience, but logistics systems must be self-reliant, expeditionary, and sovereign where possible. Logistics systems to support the Future Combat Force must shift from a bias toward garrison efficiency to a model optimised for operational effectiveness enabling resilience, continuous forward presence, close combat, and cross-domain effects.

The Indo-Pacific is expected to become increasingly complex, with grey zone activities shaping the battlespace ahead of potential LSCO across all domains. The Future Combat Force expeditionary nature and extended supply lines heighten its exposure to logistic disruption. Future logistics concepts must address challenges across three categories:

- **Threat** – adversary actions across domains.
- **Environment** – terrain, infrastructure, and communication lines.
- **Self** – internal constraints including resource competition, capability gaps, and workforce limitations.

-

To meet these demands, the sustainment concept will integrate distribution, engineering, personnel services, and health support, with a focus on agility, integration, and resilience. Capabilities must include dispersed stockpiles, robust supply chains across all classes, and autonomous systems for resupply. AI will be leveraged to enhance foresight, accuracy, and responsiveness. Divestment and disposal of capability must be carefully considered against the potential need for force expansion/mobilisation and/or to sustain prolonged LSCO in a time of strategic crisis or conflict. Resilience of forward troops and the balanced positioning of Combat Service Support capabilities and supplies will be essential to sustain the Future Combat Force at a level at which it is credible, persistent, lethal, and survivable in a dynamic battlespace.



CHAPTER 2

Concepts for the Future Combat Force



As the global security landscape continues to evolve, traditional military paradigms are increasingly insufficient to meet the complex evolving character of warfare and shifting strategic environment. A future-focused NZ Army needs to not only 'deter-through-influence' but 'deter-through-denial' of opportunity. This FFC recognises that future force requirements must encompass not only acquiring advanced platform capabilities and infrastructure, but also the rapid acquisition methods that aid accelerating and sustaining the Future Combat Force as a coherent combat system. The FFC recognises that there is a need to transition our force design and force structure s 6(a) to incorporate AI, RAS, Human Machine Teaming (HMT), future manoeuvre systems and future offensive strike capabilities, and reconsider and modernise how we train personnel. An example is the Mission Command Training Facility (MCTF),[14] which as a fully synthetic, connected training environment will provide a core and transformational component of collective training. This will advance the NZ Army's level of operations, C5ISR capability, by enabling large scale partner integration, opportunity to model and test future concepts, and train with representative capability not available to the NZDF. This theme is a key pivot to a force generation cycle that supports a constantly operating and persistent future force structure s 6(a) . Future force development will consider cognitive preparedness and the emphasis of a collective training framework that increases survivability, lethality, and rapid force projection that expands Army's strategic depth.

Across the Indo-Pacific, the Future Combat Force must be rapidly deployable at strategic, operational, and tactical levels. Achieving this requires a force that is simple, coherent in design, and capable of delivering agile, scalable responses to generate decisive land and cross-domain effects. To maintain tempo and momentum, deployability must be embedded at the system (Unit of Action) level and integrated across all warfighting functions.

[14] Mission Command Training Facility (MCTF) is a fit for purpose facility that provides the technology and infrastructure required for command-and-control education, training, and exercising of command posts and headquarters at all levels in a digitised information space.



s 6(a) [redacted]

The Future Combat Force will be capable of deploying by air using a range of methods, including airborne insertion, air transport, and aerial sustainment. s 6(a) [redacted]



Amphibious operations using landing and inflatable craft will enhance the Future Combat Force's agility and ability to deploy at scale. Given New Zealand's geography, projecting land combat power via maritime means is essential to achieving positional and temporal advantage beyond the limits of NZDF's air mobility capacity.

This chapter outlines the core concepts shaping a forward-looking Future Combat Force designed to meet the demands of modern warfare—defined by uncertainty, rapid technological change, and intensifying strategic competition. To remain effective in this environment, the NZ Army must prioritise investment in advanced capabilities that enhance agility, lethality, and responsiveness.

Key focus areas include AI, Machine Teaming, Predictive Analysis, Distributed Decision-making, Network-Centric Warfare, Automation and Rapid Targeting, Cyber and Electromagnetic Spectrum Operations, and RAS. Force modernisation will also require next-generation platforms such as vertical lift, amphibious landing craft, uncrewed systems across all domains, autonomous logistics, advanced fires, and future weapons systems. Our soldiers remain the Army's central focus – continuous transformation ensures they are equipped to fight and win.

The FFC intends to deliver a highly adaptive, rapidly deployable force—capable of projecting power by air or sea, operating effectively across the Indo-Pacific, and contributing to the protection of New Zealand's national interests globally. This approach enhances the NZDF's strategic flexibility, mobility, and ability to deliver decisive effects across domains.

Advanced Technologies

The Future Combat Force envisions operations where advanced technologies—AI, Machine Learning (ML), cyber, and electromagnetic capabilities—are trusted, ubiquitous, and fully integrated into RAS Human-Machine Teaming (HMT) across the force. These technologies will amplify lethality, survivability, Command and Control (C2), ISTAR, logistics, and training.

AI and ML will enable real-time data analysis, predictive threat assessment, and scenario planning, providing commanders at all levels with timely, actionable intelligence. High automation will accelerate human-in-the-loop targeting through autonomous systems that identify, classify, and engage threats. This will allow cognitive capacity to focus on complex decision-making while improving ISTAR, C2, and sustainment.

Dominance in the electromagnetic spectrum will be decisive. Cyber and Electronic Warfare (EW) will enhance situational awareness and protect force survivability. Supported by adaptive frameworks and policy, s 6(a)



Integrated with AI, ML, and predictive analytics, RAS will enable rapid threat identification, precision targeting, and autonomous resupply in contested environments. Attritable and consumable uncrewed systems will multiply lethal and non-lethal effects while safeguarding human and high-value platforms. Operating within a network-centric architecture, these systems will share real-time data across distributed nodes to enable decentralised C2 and mission command. Combined with cyber and EW, RAS will neutralise adversary systems while protecting friendly forces—embodying a ‘steel before blood’ approach that prioritises machine operations to reduce human risk and maximise combat effectiveness.

Advanced technologies will underpin distributed C2 and network-centric warfare. Secure, high-speed communications linking sensors, platforms, and command nodes will enable synchronised operations and real-time data exchange, strengthening mission command and multi-domain effects delivery.

Together, these technologies will transform the Future Combat Force into an agile, resilient, and lethal organisation capable of multi-domain operations in contested, rapidly evolving environments.

Force Modernisation

Achieving and sustaining operational advantage demands a deliberate and comprehensive approach to force modernisation. The force modernisation journey must be consciously balanced between meeting immediate 'fight tonight' requirements and investing in transformational capabilities that realise the Future Fighting Concept.

Modernisation must deliver a force that is agile, lethal, resilient, and adaptable across the full spectrum of operations. Investment in future capabilities, such as vertical lift platforms, amphibious landing craft and inflatable watercraft, next-generation combat vehicles, autonomous logistics, advanced offensive fires, uncrewed ground and aerial systems (UGV/UAS), EW, and cyber, will ensure a balanced and integrated warfighting edge that meets contemporary and future operational challenges.

By embracing advanced technologies and innovative combat solutions, the Future Combat Force will enhance its readiness, lethality, survivability, and sustainability. This in turn will enable the focused application of human cognitive and cultural effort where it can be most decisive.

Vertical Lift

Central to achieving rapid force projection is the consideration of future investment in vertical lift capabilities such as helicopters, which will enhance the NZ Army's aerial manoeuvrability and logistical support in diverse and complex terrain the Indo-Pacific. By considering future vertical lift technologies, the NZ Army will enhance its strategic, operational, and tactical ability to respond rapidly to emerging threats, support humanitarian missions, and protect sovereignty in our region. s 6(a) . In a future operating environment where being agile and able to rapidly respond is paramount, NZ Army will consider investing in future vertical lift capabilities to support the Army's modernisation agenda.



Amphibious Landing Craft/Inflatable Watercraft

Central to rapid force projection is to consider future investment in amphibious capabilities, which will revolutionise the NZ Army's amphibious manoeuvrability and enhance logistical support in diverse and complex terrain. These craft are essential for executing rapid deployment of forces across diverse maritime environments, enabling New Zealand to rapidly project force at an operational and tactical level to set and shape the conditions, and do this in a contested setting. Amphibious landing craft will provide the capacity to transport troops, equipment, and supplies directly onto hostile or unprepared shores, while inflatable watercraft offer rapid, flexible, and covert mobility for reconnaissance, patrol, and small-scale tactical engagements. Together these vessels bolster the future force's ability to operate seamlessly across land and sea littoral zones, allowing the NZ Army to rapidly force project in the future operating environment.



Next-Generation Combat Vehicles

The FFC envisions considering future investment in next-generation combat vehicle capabilities tailored for a rapidly deployable, agile combat force. There will be a future focus on equipping our forces with innovative, adaptable platforms that are interoperable, sustainable, and deliver enhanced lethality, mobility, and survivability of the combat system. Combat vehicles must be rapidly deployable by air or sea lift, at a scale that enables doctrinal coherence of the deployed force in the Indo-Pacific. By considering investments in next-generation combat vehicles, the Future Combat Force can enhance its future operational effectiveness in diverse and complex environments such as the Indo-Pacific region, whilst ensuring our soldiers are equipped for both traditional combat scenarios and peacekeeping operations. A systems approach to equipping the Future Combat Force with next generation combat vehicles cannot be understated – it must balance, but not compromise, the characteristics necessary for the system to be decisive on land. The integration of next-generation combat vehicles into the future force will improve interoperability with partner forces that are using similar platforms.

Autonomous Logistics

This FFC envisions a transformative approach to future warfare, where Autonomous Logistics and the use of Autonomous Logistics Vehicles (ALVs) play a pivotal role in ensuring operational efficiency and effectiveness. Autonomous logistics will leverage 3D printing to enable on-demand, decentralised manufacturing and delivery. As battlefield dynamics evolve in the future, the integration of ALVs into supply chain operations will become essential for both operational logistics and combat logistics to maintain a rapid and sustainable logistics framework. These autonomous platforms can navigate complex terrain, delivering critical supplies and equipment with minimal human intervention reducing risk to

personnel in combat zones. By utilising ALVs in the future, the NZ Army can enhance its agility, ensuring troops are resupplied quickly and efficiently, even in denied environments or hostile conditions. This innovation not only optimises resource allocation but also enables soldiers to focus on tactical manoeuvres and operational objectives.

Advanced Fires

This FFC visualises a transformational step change in the delivery and employment of advanced fires. Advanced fires will be fundamental to the Future Combat Force's ability to deliver decisive effects on the land, and to contribute cross-domain effects from the land. Integrating advanced fires technologies with rapid target acquisition, extended range and precision engagement capability will enhance the Future Combat Force's lethality, operational agility, survivability and enable adaptive responses as part of joint and coalition operations. Enhanced lethality s 6(a) will allow land-based fires to shape both the tactical and operational area in support of independent sovereign operations, or in support of partner and coalition objectives. Complementary to the Future Combat Force's ability to deliver advanced fires, is the need for multi-domain enablement of the tactical land forces. The ability of the Future Combat Force to access the full range of s 6(a) conventional offensive support, and modern cross-domain effects, will be both a key deterrent and enabler for decisive outcomes. Advanced tactical fires will provide tactical commander's the capability to shape their battlespace through the provision of timely and accurate indirect fire support. This approach will be under-pinned by seamless coordination with partner forces, robust and resilient C4 systems within which the use of advanced technologies, such as real-time data sharing and autonomous systems, are optimised.

Uncrewed Ground/Surface Vehicles

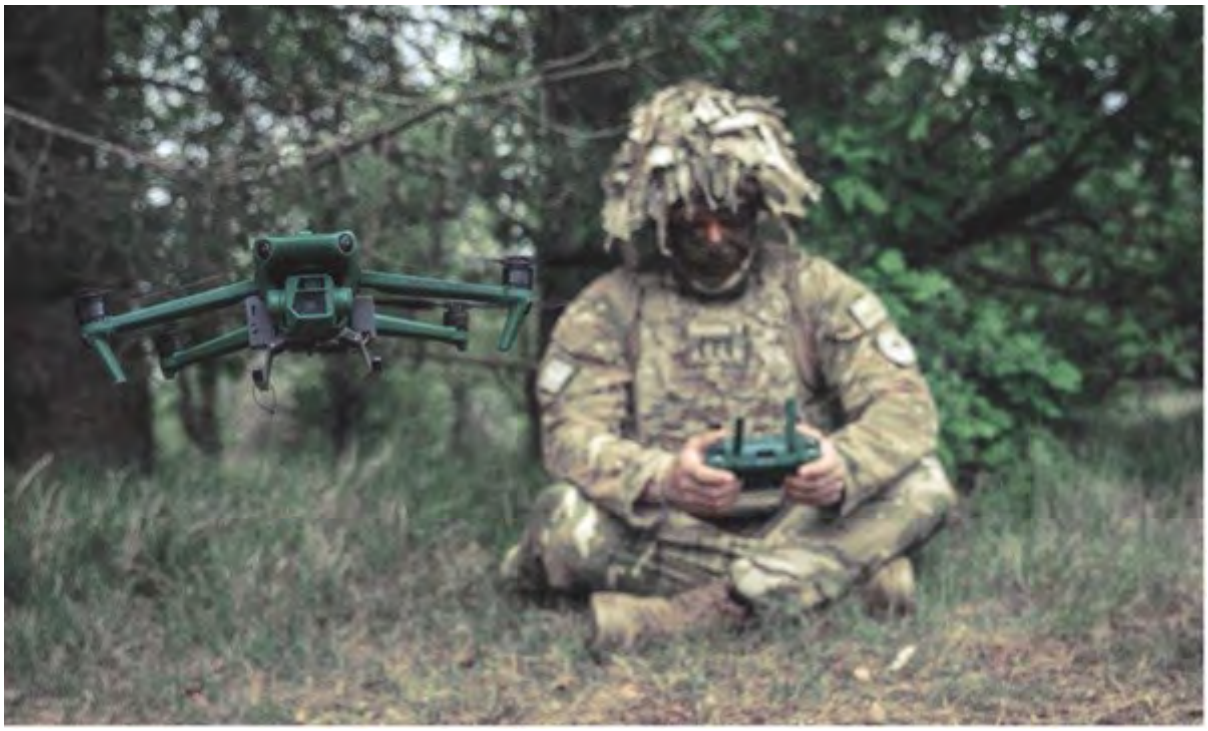
The FFC will consider the employment of UGVs and maritime Uncrewed Surface Vessels (USVs) in the future to enhance human-crewed capability, agility, situational awareness, and manoeuvre/strike capability (and sustainment – see autonomous logistics). By investing in autonomous UGVs and USVs equipped with advanced sensors, communication systems, and loitering munitions, the Future Combat Force can conduct reconnaissance, target acquisition and strike, and logistics support while reducing personnel exposure to risk. Attritable and consumable UGVs will enable lethality and tempo increase in diverse terrains, facilitate precision in mission execution, and provide real-time intelligence, thereby augmenting the capabilities of units without the need for large, heavily supported formations. USVs enhance future Indo-Pacific operations by providing persistent surveillance, reconnaissance, and capabilities in brown-water zones adjacent to the land.



Figure 2. Image of Uncrewed Ground Vehicle and maritime Uncrewed Surface Vessel

Uncrewed Aerial Systems

The Future Combat Force will integrate Uncrewed Aerial Systems (UAS) at every echelon to enhance lethality, survivability, sustainability, and agility. UAS must be ubiquitously available and employed across all levels of the force. Both consumable and reusable systems will contribute to persistent surveillance, reconnaissance, rapid target acquisition and precision strike, enabling agile manoeuvre without reliance on large personnel footprints or heavy equipment. These systems will extend operational range and increase the tempo at which force elements can operate across diverse terrains. High levels of AI and autonomy will allow human operators to focus where machines cannot, increasing survivability and operational effectiveness.



Counter-RAS (C-RAS) and Air Defence

C-RAS capabilities will be pervasive across the Future Combat Force, embedded at multiple echelons to detect, track, and neutralise a wide range of RAS threats, including UAS, UGV, and loitering munitions. These systems will be trusted, scalable and capable of providing persistent protective effect in support of dispersed operations in complex environments.

Air Defence systems will provide freedom of action to enable manoeuvre and strike on and from the land. They will complement C-UAS capabilities and be capable of integration into joint and/or coalition Air Defence systems to provide a protection against threats such as crewed aircraft, cruise missiles, and precision strike weapons.



Next-Generation Weapons Systems

This FFC envisions the introduction of next-generation weapons and ammunition that are interchangeable with partner forces. Our next-generation weapons systems will utilise NATO and ABCANZ partner forces systems standardising and reducing our sustainment footprint and enables rapid adaptation during joint operations. Standardised and interchangeable weapons platforms will provide increased agility and sustainment.

Conclusion

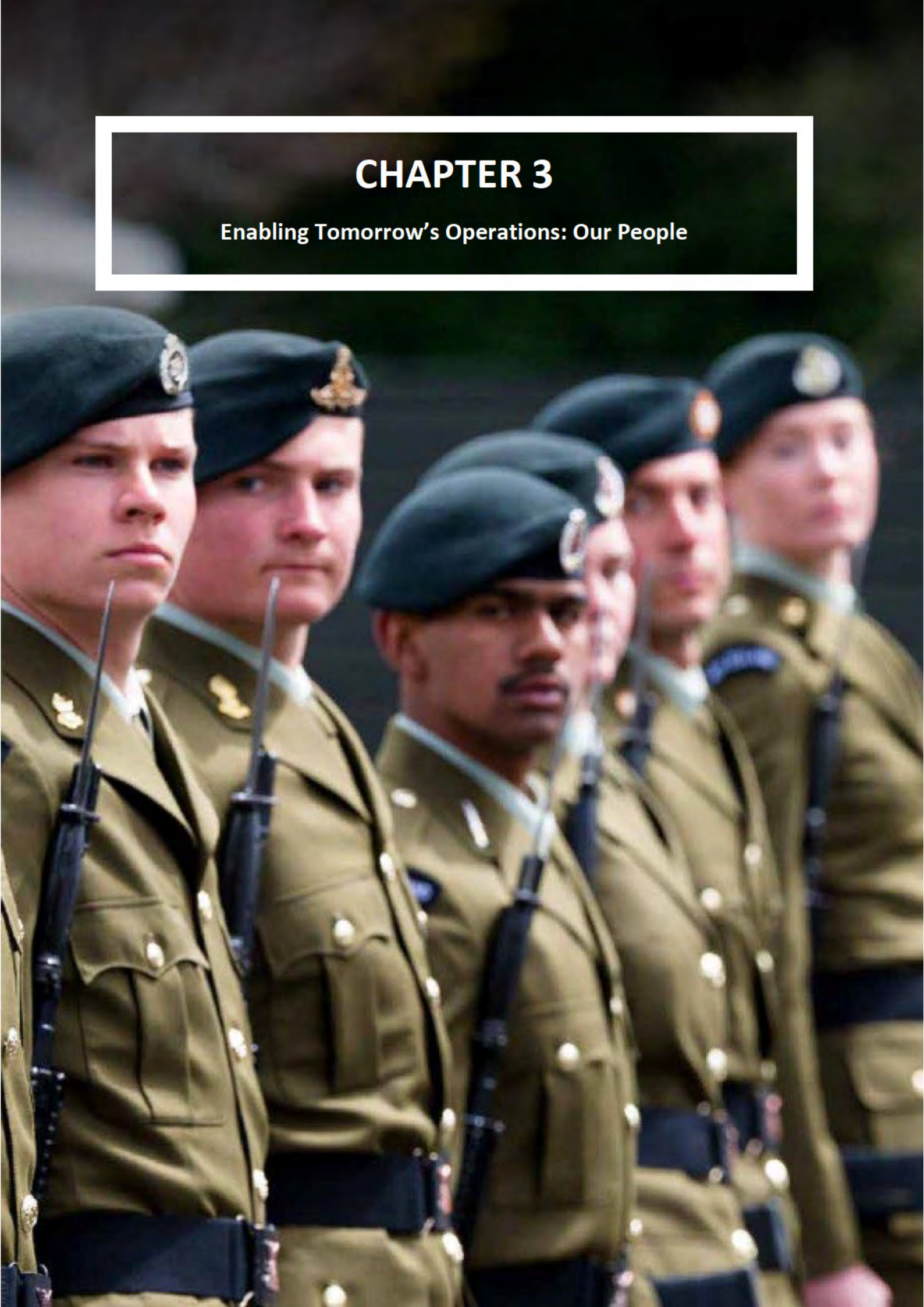
Placing an emphasis on the urgent need to prioritise future investment in, and the rapid acquisition of advanced technologies, will cultivate the modernisation of the Future Combat Force. Integrating advanced technology such as RAS, AI, quantum computing, 3D printing, and enhanced human performance technologies, the NZ Army can significantly augment decision-making speed and improve future operational effectiveness. Procuring advanced sensors, next-generation combat vehicles, autonomous logistics vehicles, along with vertical lift and amphibious capabilities, will enhance the NZ Army's efficiency, responsiveness, and ability to project force. The FFC recognises that a future-focused NZ Army must undergo a fundamental shift in mindset. s 6(a) The focus will be on delivering operational effects and sustaining continuous operations.

Over the next decade, this transformation will be phased and will integrate advanced technologies including AI, RAS, HMT, autonomous logistics, future manoeuvre platforms, and next-generation strike capabilities.

This modernisation is not optional—it is essential to ensure national security and operational readiness in an increasingly complex and volatile geopolitical environment. By fostering seamless integration between human and machine capabilities, the NZ Army will become more lethal, adaptable, responsive, cohesive, and decisive. This will enhance our ability to rapidly project force, deliver close combat effects on and from the land, protect New Zealand's sovereignty, and respond effectively to diverse challenges—while reducing risk to personnel.

CHAPTER 3

Enabling Tomorrow's Operations: Our People



As the geopolitical environment grows more complex and technological change accelerates, the NZ Army must proactively adapt to future challenges and opportunities. Central to this adaption is a continued and strategic investment in our people, which is essential for building a future combat force that is capable, adaptive, agile, coherent, lethal, and resilient. The human face of conflict will endure, and it is through our soldiers that the Army projects strength and purpose.

The New Zealand Army's future effectiveness will be defined not just by platforms and systems, but by the calibre, adaptability, and resilience of its people. In an era of strategic uncertainty and accelerating technological change, our soldiers—regular, reserve, and SF—remain the decisive edge. Investing in our people is not just a priority; it is the foundation of the Future Combat Force.

This chapter outlines a comprehensive investment approach to talent management, encompassing recruitment, retention, training, and professional development. It recognises that cognitive adaptability, emotional intelligence, and leadership under pressure are as vital as physical readiness. Through adaptive training programs and leadership development, the Army will cultivate agile thinkers and decision-makers capable of thriving in complex, contested environments.

At the heart of this investment is a commitment to leadership, ethos, and values. These enduring principles will continue to shape the character of our force, guide decision-making, and foster trust—both within the Army, with our Partners, and with the communities we serve. Army leaders must embody these values, inspire others, and lead with integrity in the face of uncertainty and adversity. By actively supporting career development, welfare, and family resilience, we will create the conditions that will unlock the full potential of the Future Combat Force.

Embracing emerging technologies, including AI and robotics, will enhance cognitive and operational performance. These tools are not replacements for soldiers but enablers—amplifying human decision-making and battlefield effectiveness. Investment in a sovereign defence industry will support tailored solutions for force design and generation, ensuring that capability development aligns with New Zealand's strategic needs and values.

Through this people-first and values-driven approach, the NZ Army will build a future-ready force—one that is lethal, resilient, and reflective of the enduring human face of conflict. Our investment in people is our investment in national security.

Talent Management

Central to this FFC are our people - our people are the most critical capability and are essential to delivering persistent and decisive effects on the land. The FFC approach embraces the importance of talent management, both individual and collective, as the cornerstone of evolution and transformation, focusing not only on efficient recruitment practices but also the growth and retention of the right personnel. By developing an environment that develops, and nurtures adaptive leadership the NZ Army of the future will

cultivate a force of innovative thinkers empowered to navigate and respond to the complex challenges of modern warfare. Cognitive agility and thought leadership will be essential.

Recruitment, Training and Retention of People

Central to the FFC is a robust future talent management concept that involves not only the strategic recruitment of personnel skilled in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) especially in high-demand areas such as cyber and AI. Personnel recruitment must forecast the requirements of the Future Combat Force across new and specialised trades, to ensure there are sufficient personnel who are suitably experienced and qualified to lead, transform, command, train and operate the force. There will also be an emphasis on how we train our personnel and retain our personnel, the most important asset of the NZ Army. An element of the future force design effort must be a redesign of education and training models to train and educate our people on new technology capabilities, creating familiarisation amongst the force. Building best practices in employment of new technologies will result in changes to officer and junior leader development as well as institutional professional military education programs.[15] By enhancing a culture of continuous learning and professional development the NZ Army will cultivate leaders in the future who are empowered to think critically and act decisively in unpredictable environments.



[15] Ryan, M. 2018. *Human-Machine Teaming for Future Ground Forces.* Centre for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA). 2018.

An emphasis on talent management will ensure that the NZ Army in the future attracts a diverse pool of candidates who can adapt to future warfare concepts and retain experienced and technically skilled individuals in STEM through competitive remuneration, and an enhanced program of professional development opportunities. As part of this FFC, Army must look to leverage the successes and learning of our partners, such as the U.S Marine Corps establishment of a Talent Management Group that works with academia and research organisations to identify initiatives that will better align individual abilities, skills, and desires with the warfighting needs of the Future Combat Force. By fostering a dynamic recruitment and training process, and an environment that cultivates the retention and continuous professional development, the NZ Army can nurture exceptional talent through a career management approach that involves evaluating secondment opportunities and fostering progressive skill advancement to support long-term professional growth and competition. People remain at the core of the NZ Army's FFC and are essential to the success of Land operations through their professional of arms and decision making.

Professional and Personnel Development

Reliance on human capital is paramount for NZ Army's Future Combat Force. The NZ Army has always been committed to the physical and mental well-being of its service members. Investing in soldiers and embracing adaptability and innovation will significantly enhance operational outputs and will cultivate a culture of continuous learning and skills acquisition. Through the integration of modern technologies and flexible training methodologies, personnel can engage in comprehensive development programs, leading to improved outcomes, job satisfaction, and career progression opportunities within a supportive and dynamic military environment. The result being a professional force enabled through team cohesion that will drive operational effectiveness, and a culture operationally focused and combat hardened.

Cognitive Adaptation

Cognitive adaptation is a crucial component of military strategy and operations, and for the FFC, it takes on particular importance. The FFC is a forward-looking conceptual framework that aims to enhance the Army's effectiveness in diverse environments and against evolving future threats. Rapid advancements in technology, including AI, uncrewed systems, and information warfare tools, require military forces to continuously adapt. Cognitive adaptation is fundamental to learning from past experiences – both successes and failures. Incorporating lessons learned into training, planning, and execution can enhance operational effectiveness and readiness. Dictums that guide military adaptation derived from lessons learned in Ukraine and are applicable in all theatres of conflict:[16]

a) Cognitive adaptation is an essential foundation for continuous generation of battlefield advantage. Effective adaptation must be nurtured at every level of a military institution.

b) Cognitive adaptation is central to learning about the enemy and improving the capacity of friendly forces to negate an adversary's advantage in technology, tactics,

[16] Ryan, M. 2025. *The New Adaptation War.* Futura Doctrina. Article. 2025

people and generation of smart ideas and massed capability over time. This occurs in war but must start in peacetime.

c) Learning and cognitive adaptation cultures and processes must be well established before war starts to minimise the shock of transition.

d) Understanding adaptation is vital to execute the most effective transition from peace to war for military organisations, enhancing organisational agility.

e) Cognitive adaptation is key to continuously improving productivity in defence industry in peace and war. There should be close links between military units and those who research and produce all forms of military material from boots to precision munitions to drones.

f) Cognitive adaptation is crucial for the cognitive elements of war. It underpins learning about enemy misinformation and the impact it is having on populations and political systems. Adaptation is important to winning a war but also to winning the "information narrative" of the war.

Adaptive Training

In the rapidly evolving landscape of combat, adaptive training is a future concept that will leverage real-time data and AI to tailor training programs for soldiers. This approach will utilise biometric feedback, performance analytics, and virtual reality simulations to create personalised training experiences that evolve alongside the soldiers' skills and techniques. By continuously assessing strengths, weaknesses, and environmental variables, this future adaptive training concept will enable soldiers to prepare for scenarios, enhancing their agility and resilience. This dynamic methodology will foster a generation of future soldiers that are not only technically proficient but also strategically highly adaptive, capable of thriving in the fluidity of modern warfare.

Adaptive Leaders

With the evolving character of warfare there is a need for future leaders to excel in adaptability and responsiveness to dynamic future operational environments. It is essential that NZ Army's future leadership development initiatives focus on embracing a more adaptive and agile approach, one that fosters innovative thinking, calculated risk-taking, and a willingness to experiment and learn from failure. By embracing a culture of continuous learning and experiential training, future leaders will be equipped to navigate complex and rapidly evolving challenges on the battlefield. This conceptual approach not only enhances individual capabilities but also promotes cohesive unit dynamics, ensuring teams can swiftly integrate into future joint and coalition operations.

Special Forces (SF)

In the evolving future operating environment, SF will be integral to achieving strategic impact across a broad spectrum of conflict. SF must be capable of operating seamlessly across the spectrum of engagement—from cooperation and competition through to crisis and conflict—providing Government with versatile and scalable response options in diverse and complex environments. The FFC acknowledges the distinct nature of their missions and

their ability to expand the range of military response options available to Government as they are integrated across the national security system. This is achieved through the employment of specialised capabilities, command arrangements, and tactics s 6(a) .[17] As the vanguard of evolution, SF require the right resourcing to operate across domains with precise, safe and well governed s 6(a) capabilities, s 6(a) . As a critical multi-domain enabler, SF will enhance the effectiveness of conventional land forces s 6(a) .



To effectively fulfil these roles, SF will be maintained at high readiness levels with capability that enables task and mission optimisation. SF will continue to select suitable candidates from across the NZDF and through direct entry, with the majority from the Future Combat Force. Owing to the small ratio of personnel that will ultimately be suitable for SF service, the Future Combat Force must be retained at a scale and professional military standard such that SF personnel remain benchmarked and interoperable with their closest partners.

Reserve Force

This FFC emphasises the critical role of Reserve Forces in providing breadth and depth in sustaining future outputs - enhancing flexibility, strengthening resilience, and enabling the capacity for force expansion and mobilisation. In response to shifts in the strategic

[17] NZDDP–3.12 New Zealand Special Operations (Fourth Edition), August 2024

environment the Reserve Force will contribute to both expeditionary and domestic outputs, strengthening national defence and domestic security. The Reserve Force will remain central to enabling a swift response to domestic contingencies and natural disasters supporting overall community resilience.

The Reserve Force contribution will be achieved through individual and contingent-level contributions of the Reserve Force. The Reserve Force will offer the Future Combat Force specialist civilian capabilities that Regular Forces cannot readily generate or sustain, and an adaptable, scalable mass that can reinforce and sustain commitments across the spectrum of operations.

The Reserve Force must be deliberately scaled and postured in alignment with the strategic environment, to ensure it is positioned to respond decisively to emerging threats.

Experimentation and Innovation

A defining characteristic of the modern battlefield is the relentless pace of technological change. To meet this challenge, the NZ Army will embrace experimentation and innovation to inform the development of the Future Combat Force. This approach will be underpinned by deliberate resourcing and prioritisation and strengthened through close collaboration with Defence Science & Technology, the Technology Accelerator Capability, and the New Zealand Defence Industry. Alignment with Plan ANZAC and synchronisation with the DCP will ensure an operational edge, whilst balancing strategic risk.

Military innovation is understood in two forms: sustaining and disruptive. Sustaining innovation focuses on integrating emerging technologies into existing Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTPs), enhancing current capabilities in a way that is often resource-intensive but necessary for modernisation. Disruptive innovation, by contrast, seeks to transform undervalued or unconventional methods of warfare, or to pioneer entirely new approaches. This form of innovation is more difficult to achieve, as it challenges entrenched organisational interests and dominant paradigms of military thought.[18] We must seek to realise this Future Fighting Concept though both the sustaining and disruptive approaches to innovation, whilst also capitalising on the benefits of fast following our ally, Australia.

By fostering a culture that embraces change and the need to maintain a tactical edge over potential adversaries, the Army aims to cultivate creativity and agility among its leaders and soldiers. Future leaders will be expected to support innovation at every echelon, empowering soldiers to propose and test new ideas, that once validated must be rapidly incorporated into TTPs. This requires a commitment to resourcing and prioritising innovation, and a willingness to remain open to unconventional solutions. Army will focus on capturing successful innovations and disseminating them across the force, encouraging boldness and creativity in pursuit of operational excellence.

Deliberate experimentation will enable the exploration of novel concepts, the refinement of tactics through wargaming, and the integration of advanced technologies to enhance force effectiveness. Through iterative experimentation, the Army will develop and optimise TTPs,

[18] Farrell, T. Rynning, S. & Terriff, T. 2013. *Transforming Military Power since the Cold War: Britain, France, and the United States, 1991-2012.* Cambridge University Press.

test new capabilities, and allocate resources more effectively, all in pursuit of greater agility, lethality, survivability, and sustainability. This commitment to experimentation, innovation and wargaming will ensure the NZ Army remains a relevant and capable partner of choice, ready to meet the challenges of future conflict environments.



Wargaming

Wargaming serves as a critical tool within this FFC to develop an environment where foresight and adaptive thinking can contribute to maintaining our operational advantage. By simulating potential scenarios and operational challenges, wargaming will enhance the Future Combat Force's ability to anticipate adversary actions, refine tactical methodologies, test concepts, and explore innovative solutions. This approach will not only cultivate a shared understanding of complex military dynamics but also encourage a culture of collaboration and continuous learning among personnel. As threats become increasingly multifaceted and technology-driven, wargaming equips the Future Combat Force with a robust framework for crafting agile responses, ensuring that commanders and soldiers are prepared to navigate the complexities of modern warfare with confidence. This concept will require a strong relationship with Defence Science and Technology, coupled with wargaming capabilities that enable Live, Virtual and Constructive simulation integration with partner environments, at the Unit of Action and higher echelon levels.

Embracing Technology

A future-focused NZ Army will actively seek to integrate innovative technologies, such as AI, robotics, and uncrewed systems into its future force design and force structure over the next decade. Emerging technologies and capabilities will also be examined and appropriate financial support and freedom to innovate with the technologies, rather than just used to replace an existing system and needs to be inherent in experimentation. Through

conducting experimentation with new technologies through joint exercises and partnerships assisted by academic and industry stakeholders, will allow the NZ Army to adapt rapidly to emergent capabilities and threats. The convergence of human machine teaming is redefining the future of warfare, and the NZ Army will embrace this convergence as the implications of this new technology will be felt across the spectrum of military operations, from tactical engagements to strategic planning.

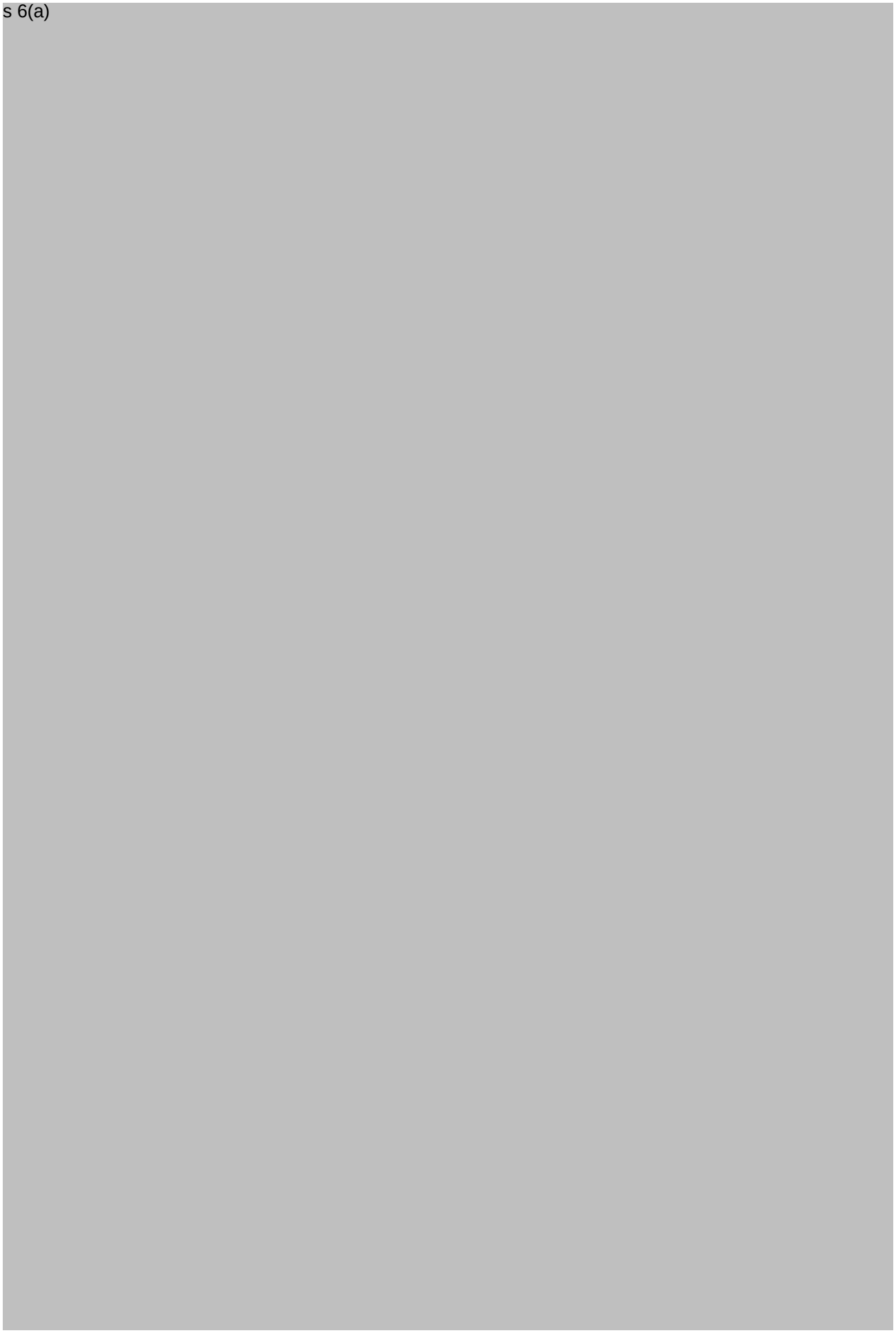
Sovereign Defence Industry

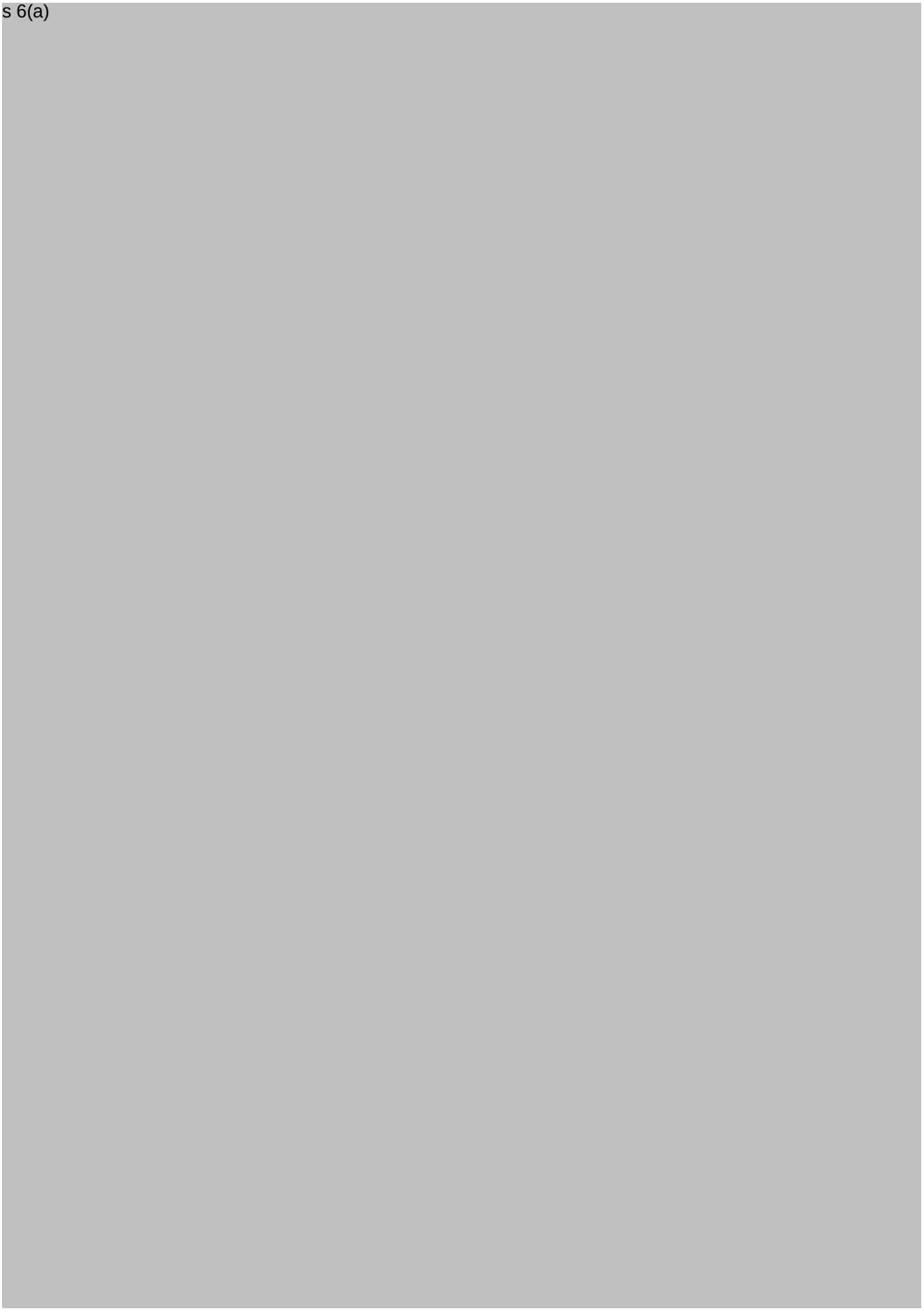
Embracing and supporting a sovereign NZ defence industry is a strategic imperative that aligns with the FFC vision to foster innovation, adaptation, increase resiliency and reduce capability acquisition timelines. This will strengthen the resilience of the Future Combat Force, enhance self-reliance, and enable timely access to domestically manufactured capabilities. In an era of contested and congested supply chains, sovereign industrial capacity is essential to maintaining operational sustainment and reducing reliance on foreign entities. Innovative options, including through the Technology Accelerator Capability, will be explored to provide domestic industry opportunity to solve battlefield challenges and contribute to the realisation of this FFC. Investment in New Zealand's sovereign defence industry will harness the domestic supply chain and innovation, and support local industry and advanced manufacturing, in turn contributing to the operational effectiveness of the Future Combat Force.[19]



[19] New Zealand Ministry of Defence, 2025. *Defence Industry Strategy*. 2025.

s 6(a)




s 6(a)

s 6(a)



Conclusion

The NZ Army's concept to enable tomorrow's operations hinges on a comprehensive and forward-looking approach that integrates strategic investment, talent management, adaptability, SF, and Reserves. By adopting a proactive investment approach, the Army will ensure the necessary capabilities and infrastructure are in place to meet future challenges. Talent management remains central to this concept, with targeted recruitment, retention, and personnel initiatives that support continuous development and resilience. Emphasising adaption, the Army will develop flexible training programs and cultivate adaptive leaders, fostering a workforce capable of responding to evolving operational environments.

Simultaneously, embracing experimentation, innovation, and wargaming – particularly through harnessing emerging technologies and supporting a sovereign defence industry – will position the Army with the ability to enhance self-sufficiency with capability acquisition. This technological integration into the Future Combat Force will complement our personnel and will be considered when addressing future force design. Efforts will also focus on force generation, s 6(a) ensuring a more agile, and effective force. Together, these initiatives will enable the NZ Army to meet the demands of tomorrow's complex landscape with confidence, agility, and resilience.

Conclusion



Though the landscape of warfare is undergoing transformative change, future conflict will remain a profoundly human endeavour. Even as technology reshapes the character of warfare, our people will remain our most critical capability.

The purpose of this FFC is to inform the design and structure of the New Zealand Army's Future Combat Force. It recognises the imperative for rapid acquisition of technologically advanced platforms and the integration of innovations in AI, RAS, cyber capabilities, and network-centric operations. This concept seeks to bring coherence to our force structure, ensuring it remains agile, adaptive, and capable of operating effectively in increasingly complex and contested environments. The concepts and requirements of this document are to deliberately guide future capabilities, organisational structure, and force generation development. The NZ Army's FFC embodies a pivotal strategic shift in response to the complexities of the contemporary and evolving international environment. As the character of warfare evolves, characterised by asymmetric threats, advances in modern warfare doctrine and strategies, and the proliferation of advanced technologies that are increasing the intensity of conflict, the NZ Army must position itself as a responsive and adaptable rapid response force capable of meeting diverse operational demands. This requires a multifaceted approach that emphasises the integration of advanced technology and agile force structures. While cutting-edge equipment and innovative systems will undoubtedly enhance operational capabilities, their true effectiveness hinges on the professionalism, competency, and unyielding resilience of the individuals who wield them. Therefore, our FFC must commence from a human-centric foundation, prioritising continuous training, personnel development, decision-making under duress, and cohesive teamwork ensuring that the Army can effectively operate and succeed across the full spectrum of conflict.

In today's international landscape, the pressures of globalisation, shifting power dynamics, climate change, and evolving geopolitical landscapes necessitate that the NZ Army advances it capability acquisition at an accelerated pace. The rapid acquisition of new technologies and capabilities is critical not just for maintaining competitive advantage, but also for maintaining operational readiness in the face of time-sensitive threats. A highly adaptive, rapidly deployable combat force can provide unique operational advantages through flexibility and responsiveness; however, this requires a significant transformation in both force design and garrison structure. The conventional models of military organisation will not suffice; instead, they must evolve to nurture agility and enhance the speed of decision-making and deployment.

Our FFC is premised on retaining the Manoeuvrist Approach to warfare and a philosophy of mission command, against which transformation is required. Central to our transformational requirements is the need for ongoing investment in our people, the integration of advanced technologies and next-generation combat vehicles and weapon systems that enable real-time situational awareness, enhanced communication, lethality, and precision strike. The interconnectivity of networks and the rise of uncrewed systems, AI, and cyber capabilities are not merely supplemental: they are now central to the effectiveness of a modern military force. The Future Combat Force must see investment in seamless technological integration that enables a cohesive operational approach that is

both swift and effective, allowing for rapid deployment and combat operations responsive to the fluid nature of the future battlefield.

Moreover, the emphasis on training, experimentation, and innovation is paramount. The complex realities of modern warfare demand that soldiers not only become experts in conventional tactics but also engage in wargaming and simulated experiences that develop innovative thinking and operational creativity at every echelon. The commitment to continuous iterations through experimentation will refine future TTPs, ensuring that lessons learned are rapidly incorporated into the future operational framework. It is through such adaptive learning that the NZ Army will cultivate a culture of innovation and resilience, essential for overcoming both anticipated and unforeseen challenges.

This FFC promotes the vision of highly adaptive, rapidly deployable, multi-domain capable combat force. It must deliver decisive effects on land and contribute to the multi-domain fight from the land. This can only be realised through a holistic transformation of the NZ Army. This involves s 6(a) embracing a future orientated mindset that prioritises rapid capability acquisition and technological integration. As the global landscape continues to evolve, the NZ Army must be capable of delivering combat effects on and from land, to project and influence beyond our borders, protect our sovereignty and EEZ, and be Indo-Pacific experts and globally capable. Operations will require interoperability with Joint and partner nations and contribute in a meaningful and effective way. The pathway forward will be complex, but it is both necessary and achievable, positioning the NZ Army to assert its relevance and effectiveness in a rapidly evolving world.

Military Definitions

Adaption – the ability to change strategy, force generation, and/or military plans and operations undertaken in response to operationally challenges and campaign pressures.

Agility – the ability to tactically reposition, reorient, or adjust its objectives in response to evolving threats.

Coherency – ensures that organisations are aligned. That the component parts work in harmony towards the common objective, minimising contradictions, redundancies, and misalignments.

Experimentation – a fundamental purpose of experimentation is the acquisition of knowledge to guide decision by exploring innovative methods of operation, especially to assess feasibility, evaluate utility, or determine their limits. Experimentation supports the process of innovation, a process that can lead to evolutionary change.[20]

Innovation – the identification, creation and implementation of ideas that deliver new value, enhancing our operational outputs, organisational knowledge, and capability.

Interoperability – the ability for allies to act together coherently, effectively, and efficiently to achieve tactical, operational, and strategic objectives enabling forces, units and/or systems to operate together.

Lethality – the enhanced ability of a military force to deliver effective and overwhelming force against an adversary, resulting in greater damage, disruption, or destruction of enemy personnel, equipment, and infrastructure.

Resilience – the capacity to overcome the negative effects of setbacks and associated stress on military performance and combat effectiveness.

Responsiveness – the ability to respond to evolving threats in a timely matter (to act with the utmost speed) and often goes together with agility.

Survivability – the ability of a military force, unit, or asset to avoid or withstand threats and continue to operate effectively in a combat or operational environment.

Sustainability – the ability to maintain its operational capabilities over time, ensuring that it can effectively continue its mission without being overly strained by logistics, personnel demands, resource limitations, or environmental factors.

Utility – defined as the state or quality of being useful militarily or operationally**.**[21]

[20] Worley, R. 1999. *Defining Military Experiments.* Institute for Defence Analysis. 1999
[21] Ibid.

Technology Definitions

Artificial Intelligence (AI): The capability of a functional unit to perform functions that are generally associated with human intelligence such as reasoning and learning.[22]

Autonomous Drones: An unmanned aircraft capable of understanding higher-level intent and direction, sensing its environment, and based on a set of rules and limitations, choosing from alternatives and taking actions to bring about an optimal but potentially unpredictable state without human input.[23]

C5ISR: Stands for Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Cyber, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance. This framework emphasises the integration of these elements to improve situational awareness, decision-making, and overall operational effectiveness.

Enhanced Human Performance: Wearable exoskeletons might enhance strength, speed, and endurance, making soldiers more effective in the field. Similarly, neural interfaces and brain-computer interfaces will improve reaction times and cognitive functions.

Future Fires: The innovative and adaptive use of fire systems and technologies that enhance the effectiveness, responsiveness, range, and rate of fire from the land and to the land. This concept encompasses the development and deployment of advanced artillery capabilities, including precision-guided ammunitions, autonomous targeting systems, and networked fire control solutions. The key to this application is reducing sensor to shooter processing.

Human-Machine Teaming: Human-machine teaming is a relationship – one made up of at least three equally important elements: the human, the machine, and the interactions and interdependencies between them.[24]

Quantum Computing: Harnesses the unique qualities of quantum mechanics to solve problems beyond the ability of even the most powerful classical computers. Quantum computing will be able to process massively complicated problems enhancing decision-making and providing real-time data pace within modern warfare.

Robotic Combat Units: A mechanical device, usually programmable, designed to perform tasks of manipulation or locomotion under automatic control.[25]

Sensors: Are both human and robotically formed to enhance responsibilities of defence forces. Information dimension contributes to the conditions that deter close combat or enhance decisional opportunities to strike before the enemy. Current and future weapons and intelligence-collection systems rely heavily on sensors. The objective of sensors is to develop and optimise sensor packages for small uncrewed platforms such as Uncrewed Ground Vehicles (UGVs), Uncrewed Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), and Uncrewed Ground Sensors (UGSs).

3D Printing: Enables rapid production of tailored equipment and spare parts, ensuring logistical efficiency and operational readiness. The technology fosters *Innovation* and adaptability, allowing for the quick prototyping of new designs that can enhance mission effectiveness and provide a tactical edge.

[22] NZDF, 2025. *Robotic and Autonomous Systems Concept,* 2025.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

Core Ideas and Application of the Future Fighting Concepts in Operations

Emerging concepts for land forces, particularly those focused on enabling rapid deployability, are increasingly shaped by the demands of modern warfare, technological advancements, and evolving geopolitical realities. key concepts and how they can be applied operational include:

Distributed Operations. **Core Idea:** Highly mobile units operate independently across a wide battlespace but remain connected through robust communication networks. Underpinned by the Manoeuvrist Approach to warfare, the Future Combat Force will be an adaptable and agile system that is able to be rapidly deployed to where it can shape and deliver decisive effects in its battlespace. **Application:** The Future Combat Force uses its agility and combat power, both mounted and dismounted, to exploit weaknesses in enemy deployments that have been created by fires and manoeuvre. Situational awareness, robust command and communications systems, precision fires, coordinated action and mission command philosophy will give a decisive advantage on the battlefield.

Air, Land, and Sea Littoral. **Core Idea:** Highly flexible, interconnected, and distributed force capable of operating effectively across complex, congested and contested littoral environments. **Application:** Air, land, and sea assets are not treated as separate entities but as integrated components working in concert to achieve objectives.

Lethality. **Core Idea:** Enhanced ability to deliver effective and overwhelming force against an adversary, resulting in greater damage, disruption, or destruction of enemy personnel, equipment, and infrastructure. **Application:** Increasing the lethality across the land forces at all echelons, utilising a variety of delivery systems. Leveraging long-range artillery and missile systems, the use of drone swarms, launched effects and other innovative weapons the force can neutralise threats before they close in enabling rapid, coordinated, and adaptive responses across multiple domains.

Advanced Joint Fires. **Core Idea:** Integration of multi-domain weapon systems – air, land, sea, space, cyberspace – to deliver precise, timely, and effective firepower and effects. **Application:** Advanced joint fires will enhance land forces operational agility, survivability, and mission success by enabling rapid target acquisition, precise engagement, effective and adaptive responses in joint, multinational, and asymmetric scenarios.

Enduring Regional Engagement. **Core Idea:** Persistent, deep, and focused engagement with regional security forces and communities. **Application:** Will improve collective situational awareness, interoperability, trust, demonstrating collective resolve and supporting regional security.

Operationally Ready. **Core Idea:** A ready and prepared force that can rapidly respond to emerging threats and opportunities that provides the integrated force broad options of infiltration and extraction, or of projection. A modernised army training capability will set the conditions to support growth, and during crisis expansion and/or mobilisation of Army at a level at which operations can be sustained. Assured access to training areas that allow the full range and scale of Future Combat Force effects to be exercised in relevant physical and virtual synthetic environments, including across the electromagnetic spectrum. **Application:** Reduced “R times” across the force to meet strategic indicators and warnings.

Operational readiness requires high operational awareness and is underpinned by the need to invest in world-class, sovereign training facilities that deliver enhanced readiness outcomes, equipment, infrastructure, sustainment, and support systems.

Coherent Rapidly Deployable Force. **Core Idea:** Coherent force that is a highly adaptive 'system' capable of operations across the spectrum of conflict in the Indo-Pacific and offers credible military response options globally. Force structure is built around Units of Action, not below Battle Group. This structure is based on the principle of simplicity, allowing Land and Joint Commanders the flexibility to scale appropriately for the mission set. **Application:** The land force will apply innovative principles to enhance or develop novel employment methods for current capabilities, to gain asymmetric advantage.

Expeditionary Forces: Manoeuvrable, Survivable, and Sustained by Rapid Projection. **Core Idea:** A mobile land force, designed for dismounted and mounted operations that operate in the littoral regions; manoeuvring by land, sea, and air from New Zealand, and able to project and sustain force within the Pacific. **Application:** The land force is, supported by design all-domain capabilities that are resident in the NZ Joint Force. NZ Army may need to invest in next generation vertical lift, parachute capability and littoral mobility.

Signature-managed Land Force. **Core Idea:** The ISR threat and the consequence fire that it enables, also requires the hardening of the light forces, through defensive positions, which constricts manoeuvre. The application of better signature management may potentially reduce the absolute requirement, thereby allowing more agility on the battlefield, rather than having to stay in defensive positions for survival. **Application:** The land force will coordinate and manage electromagnetic warfare in operational planning and within the Joint Force to ensure alignment of system signatures and physical characteristics to degrade adversary situational awareness.

Integrated, Technologically Enabled. **Core Idea:** Distributed operations will rely on integrated C2 systems at scale that are enabled to communicate with partners in real-time. **Application:** The land force, supported by space and cyber domain capabilities, will employ technology tailored to the mission to remain effective in a degraded information environment across vast distances. Training development considers the use of both analogue and digital awareness. Digital systems provide speed of analysis and precision of target acquisition across independent and integrated operations.

Human-Machine Teaming/Robotic Autonomous Systems. **Core Idea:** Integration of autonomous systems, such as UAV's or robotic ground systems, to enhance force capabilities. **Application:** Uncrewed systems for reconnaissance, defence and intercept of adversary drones, logistics, and strikes, creating mass, increasing human survivability, and lethality are employed ubiquitously across the Future Combat Force. The agile employment of RAS will be culturally ingrained and exploited from ab initio training to operations.

Complex Terrain. **Core Idea:** Increased focus on fighting within complex terrain, urban environments, jungles, and mountainous regions where manoeuvrability of traditional heavy forces is constrained. **Application:** Agile, light forces with expertise in navigating complex terrain, using smaller vehicles and adaptable tactics. Survivability is focused on stealth, mobility, dispersion, and the increasing lethality of portable RAS technology.

Sustainability and Resilience. **Core Idea:** Enhanced emphasis on self-sustainment and resilience under prolonged austere conditions. Simplicity of the combat system, interoperability/interchangeability with partners, and the coherence of system design reduces multiple chains of supply and support. **Application:** Standardisation of fleet types and commonality with our ally and partners, the use of additive manufacturing, renewable energy sources, and modular supply systems ensures operational independence and endurance. Operationally, supply chains are reduced, and interoperability is simplified. Strategically the force will seek rapid acquisition methodologies that will (where possible) leverage NZ industry or as a minimum will privilege regional suppliers that reinforce resilient supply chains.

Cognitive Preparedness. **Core Idea:** Prioritise mental agility, manoeuvre warfare and mission command mindsets, technological literacy, and empowering initiative through decentralised control. There is a need that this is trained and practiced to a high level of proficiency at all levels of command, especially relevant for operating in a dispersed/distributed manner. **Application:** Emphasis on developing soldiers who can operate effectively in air-ground-littoral environments and throughout complex terrain, both with and without technological reliance. When forces are rapidly projected, they will go through prolonged periods of isolation from other forces and will encounter risks associated with resupply and medical attention that is mitigated by resilience within force structure, contingency planning, and operational design.

Cultural Preparedness. **Core Idea:** The New Zealand Army is founded on four key values – Courage, Commitment, Comradeship, and Integrity – that ground its identity, and these have been framed to reflect what is fundamental for high operational performance.[26] **Application:** Interact with local populations to understand customs and cultural practices to work towards deep cooperation and environmental understanding with partner land forces in the Pacific region.

[26] NZ Army, 2025. Army *Capstone Orders, Army Command Statement, Version 2.* 2025.

Annex A

New Zealand's Geo-Strategic Environment

In an increasingly complex international environment characterised by shifting power dynamics, rising geopolitical tensions, and rapid technology advancements, New Zealand finds itself at a pivotal intersection of opportunity and challenge. New Zealand's unique geostrategic context, positioned in the South Pacific makes it both an ally and target for emergent security threats. The evolving character of warfare – marked by hybridisation of warfare, cyber threats, the introduction of Robotic and Autonomous Systems (RAS) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) into the battlefield environment, and non-state actors – demands a critical reassessment of how the NZ Army structures and organises itself. As we delve into the intricacies of New Zealand's military threats, we must confront a stark reality; traditional notions of warfare have given way to a more complex character of conflict. The threats we face are no longer confined to the battlefield; they pervade our cyber networks, maritime routes, and the very fabric of society.

In developing the Future Fighting Concept (FFC), the PMESII-PT framework has been used to assess the international environment.

- **P**olitically, understanding global power dynamics and alliances influences strategic positioning.
- **M**ilitary considerations such as emerging threats and technology proliferation shape force modernisation.
- **E**conomically, shifts in global markets and resource availability impact defence funding and logistics.
- **S**ocial factors, including international public opinion and cultural exchanges, affect diplomatic and operational approaches.
- **I**nformation warfare and cyber domains are prioritised within the information component, reflecting modern threat landscapes.
- **I**nfrastructure resilience in partnered nations influences deployment options,
- Physical environment, including climate and terrain, informs adaptable operational planning.
- Temporal trends and geopolitical shifts ensure the NZ Army remains agile and responsive in a rapidly evolving international security environment.

Considerations of International Environment

The Indo-Pacific region has become a critical focal point of international security concerns with its geopolitical complexity directly influencing New Zealand's strategic environment. As a small, geographically isolated nation reliant on trade and that is committed to regional stability, New Zealand must navigate this volatile environment with a nuanced approach.

New Zealand's Defence Policy and Security Statement, 2023[27], and the Defence Capability Plan 2025 highlights that New Zealand is facing its most challenging and dangerous strategic environment in decades.[28] The rise of the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a regional and global power is reshaping the Indo-Pacific. The PRCs growing military and political capabilities pose significant challenges to the rules-based international system. For New Zealand, this creates a delicate balancing act between maintaining its strong economic ties with a potential adversary and supporting international norms, including freedom of navigation and respect for sovereignty.

New Zealand's national security depends on the rules-based international system – the institutions, rules, and norms that shape how New Zealand works with the world, how our voice is heard, and our interests realised.

New Zealand's Core National Security Issues:[29]

- Strategic competition and the international rules-based system
- Emerging, critical, and sensitive technologies
- Disinformation
- Foreign interference and espionage
- Terrorism and violent extremism
- Transnational organised crime
- Economic security
- Pacific resilience and security
- Maritime security
- Border security
- Cyber security
- Space security

As a result of the PRCs growing assertiveness strategic competition between themselves and the USA has intensified regional tensions. The PRC seeks to expand their influence, displace U.S global hegemony, and challenge existing stability in volatile areas. As a close strategic partner of the USA, and a member of the Five Eyes (FVEYS) intelligence sharing community, New Zealand must reconcile its security partnerships with its commitment to an independent foreign policy. New Zealand's commitment to international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), reflects its advocacy for a rules-based system. Participation in regional defence and economic partnerships, such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), and

[27] New Zealand Government, 2023. *New Zealand Defence Policy and Security Statement*. 2023
[28] New Zealand Government, 2025. *Defence Capability Plan.* Chapter 1: Strategic Environment. 2025.
[29] New Zealand Government, 2023. *Secure Together: New Zealand's National Security Strategy 2023-2028.* 2023.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) led initiatives, enhances New Zealand's ability to contribute to security cooperation and project influence beyond our border.

Climate change, rising sea levels and natural disasters are of significant concern that could threaten the stability of Pacific Island nations, which New Zealand considers vital to its strategic interests. Climate change will displace populations and lead to civil and political instability. Addressing strategic competition and climate change requires a whole-of-government approach with robust military capabilities that deny adversarial advantage, greater humanitarian, and development assistance for our Pacific partners, as well as proactive engagement in regional forums such as the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF).

The strategic threats in the Indo-Pacific centre on competition, cooperation, and conflict and present both challenges and opportunities for New Zealand. Navigating these dynamics requires a balanced approach that prioritises regional stability, upholds international norms, strengthens partnerships, and acquires capability that matches our intent. By leveraging its reputation as an honest broker and champion of multilateralism, New Zealand can play a constructive role in addressing the region's complex security landscape while safeguarding its national interests.

Geo-Strategic Environment

New Zealand's proximity to the Pacific Ring of Fire makes it vulnerable to natural disasters, including earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and tsunamis. Located in the Southwestern Pacific Ocean, approximately 1500 kilometres east of Australia, New Zealand's rugged coastline, mountainous terrain, and vast oceans creates challenges for economic development and transportation connectivity. New Zealand's strategic location positions it between the PRC and the USA, reinforcing its role within the broader island chain strategy to project influence and maintain regional stability in the Pacific and Antarctic. The island chain strategy significantly shapes New Zealand's geostrategic posture by positioning it within a regional network of maritime and air corridors that extend from the Pacific to Asia. As part of the broader Indo-Pacific landscape, New Zealand's location offers both strategic leverage and vulnerabilities, emphasising the importance of sovereignty, maritime security, and regional partnerships.

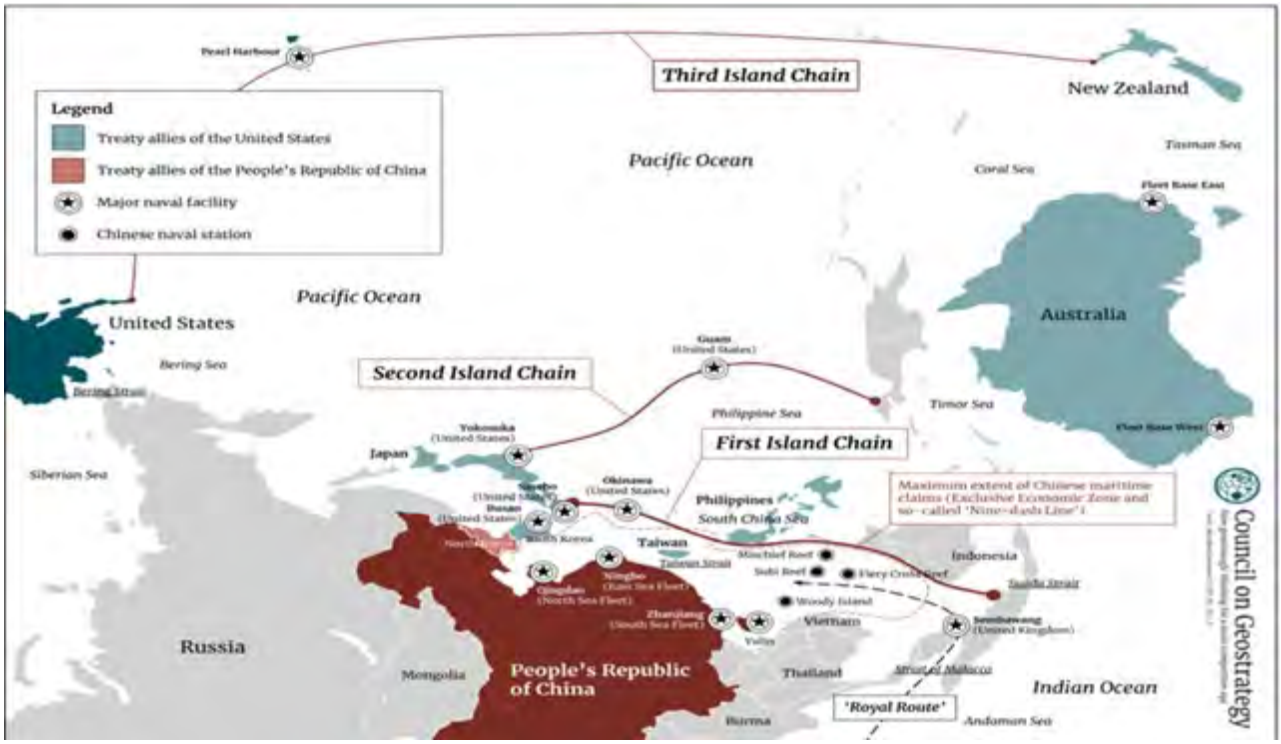


Figure 4: Council on Geostrategy, 2024. Map of Island Chains: The map above represents the island chain strategy. As global security evolves due to increased security competition, New Zealand and Australia's security landscape will be challenged.

New Zealand's geopolitics is shaped by its relationships with key regional and global powers. New Zealand has an alliance with AUS, is a member of the Five Powers Defence Arrangements (FPDA) with AUS, Malaysia, Singapore, and the United Kingdom, has strong working relationships with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), a grouping of AUS, USA, India, and Japan aimed at promoting security and stability, is part of the Indo-Pacific Four (IP4) group of NATO partners which includes Japan, South Korea, AUS, and New Zealand, and is part of American, British, Canadian, AUS, and New Zealand (ABCANZ) armies a program aimed at optimising interoperability and standardisation.

Overall, New Zealand's geostrategic environment is characterized by its unique geography, proximity to major powers, and diverse relationships with regional and global actors. New Zealand must navigate the complexities of the Asia-Pacific and shifting regional dynamics while promoting its own security, economic, and strategic interests. As the global landscape continues to evolve, New Zealand's geopolitical environment will remain a critical factor in shaping its future.

New Zealand's Strategic Concerns

The future operating environment is anticipated to be increasingly contested, congested and complex. It is expected that logistics will be contested and congested in the future operating environment. ABCANZ defines contested logistics as the completion for resources and adversarial actions across multiple domains (physical and virtual) which impact the act of planning, executing, and enabling the movement and support of military force. s 6(a)

The concept of Contested Logistics attempts to solve a handful of challenges that can be categorised as challenges of:

- **Threat** – adversary actions across domains.
- **Environment** – terrain, infrastructure, and communication lines.
- **Self** – internal constraints including resource competition, capability gaps, and workforce limitations.

As geopolitical rivalries intensify, the Indo-Pacific will face multifaceted challenges that span multiple domains – including maritime, air, cyber, and information spaces – demanding a comprehensive and adaptive strategic response. Cyber threats and information warfare are emerging as critical frontiers, capable of disrupting vital national interest. New Zealand's defence interests include:

- A secure and sovereign nation
- A stable and resilient Pacific region
- A strong collective security through partnerships
- A robust international rules-based system

In this dynamic landscape, New Zealand must cultivate deep expertise in the Pacific region, understanding its unique strategic, cultural, and geopolitical nuances, while developing globally capable forces that can operate effectively across all domains. This dual focus ensures that the NZ Army can safeguard sovereignty, contribute meaningfully to regional security, and adapt to the evolving nature of modern warfare – balancing regional expertise with the ability to project power and influence on the global stage.

Rising Regional Tensions

One of the primary challenges facing New Zealand's security landscape in the Indo-Pacific is the escalating assertiveness of the PRC. As the PRC rapidly expands its economic, political, and military influence in the Indo-Pacific region, New Zealand will find itself grappling with the implications of their growth in power. 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.[30] Increasingly, our adversaries have displayed a willingness to use military force to coerce their neighbours to suit their own interests.[31] In addition to expanding their conventional forces and capabilities, these threats are also rapidly advancing their space, cyber, electronic warfare, and information capabilities.

South Pacific

The future operating environment in the South Pacific is characterised by increased connectivity, complexity, and emerging threats, driven by rapid technological advancements and evolving geopolitical threats. As traditional geographic protection diminishes, New Zealand's strategic vulnerability stems from its reliance on open trade routes, maritime corridors, and both commercial and military lines of communications – assets that adversaries can now target through cyber disruptions, maritime interdiction, or asymmetric campaigns. In this context, the importance of acquiring and maintaining robust military

[30] New Zealand Government, 2023. *New Zealand Defence Policy and Security Statement*. 2023.
[31] ABCANZ, 2025. *American, British, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Armies' Program: Strategy 2035.* 2nd Edition, 2025.

capabilities cannot be overstated; adversaries can operate deep within the South Pacific, challenging New Zealand's sovereignty, and influence through both hard and soft power, s 6(a) [redacted].

Climate Change and Human Security

While traditional military threats have historically dominated strategic discourse, emerging non-traditional security threats necessitate a broader understanding of security. Climate change poses an existential threat to New Zealand, manifesting in rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and the degradation of natural resources. These environmental changes can lead to food and water insecurity, displacement of populations, and the increased likelihood of conflict arising from resource scarcity. As a response, the NZ Army must consider a variety of scenarios not just as a necessity to combat, but also through the lens of Humanitarian Assistance Disaster Relief (HADR) capabilities, supporting civil authorities enabling a whole-of-government response.

Cybersecurity Threats

In the digital age, cyber threats represent another significant risk to New Zealand's national security. As New Zealand's reliance on technology increases, state and non-state actors can exploit vulnerabilities. Cyberattacks can disrupt critical infrastructure, including communication networks, financial systems, and essential services, leading to economic instability and loss of public confidence. To counteract these threats, New Zealand must enhance its cybersecurity measures in the future and foster international collaboration to build resilience against cyber warfare.

Information Warfare

The challenge of contesting discourse power has emerged as an important element of adversarial strategic thinking. This involves the use of information, belief, and mentality which includes the integrated employment of public opinion warfare, legal warfare, and psychological warfare – integrated into information operations. The development of AI technologies, particularly advanced language models, generative AI, opaque AI, and deep fakes, has drastically expanded the scope of possible disinformation campaigns. This mode of operations has already been employed by adversaries to influence or spread

misinformation.[32] These advanced AI technologies will enhance adversaries' ability to conduct information operations at an unprecedented scale and sophistication in the future.

Considering these challenges, this FFC considers how the NZ Army can be more flexible to deliver a rapid response and adapt to this complex security environment in the future. Strengthening alliances, particularly within frameworks like Plan ANZAC, FVEY, ABCANZ, PIF, FPDA will provide New Zealand with critical diplomatic and military partnerships. New Zealand's defence policy emphasises a focus on readiness and interoperability with strategic partners, particularly in humanitarian and peacekeeping operations. However, as global hostilities increase, the NZ Army must evaluate its defence posture in the future, ensuring that its military capabilities match the evolving array of threats to perform combat operations and decisive action. As the geopolitical environment becomes increasingly complex, proactive measures and adaptations in policy and defence capabilities are essential for maintaining New Zealand's security. By strengthening its alliance and strategic partnerships, enhancing defence capabilities, and addressing non-traditional security threats, the NZ Army can protect New Zealand sovereignty, our EEZ, realm countries located in the Pacific, project influence beyond our border, and contribute to regional stability in an uncertain future.

The Evolving Character of Warfare

The character of warfare is undergoing a profound transformation with the introduction of advanced technologies, marking a significant shift to how conflicts are fought and managed. This evolution is driven by technological advancements that enhance the capabilities of military forces – speed of decision-making, lethality and precision, and distributed operations – while simultaneously redefining the roles of personnel – Human-Machine integration, augmented soldiers, and uncrewed systems – in combat scenarios. As has been witnessed in Ukraine/Russia conflict the ubiquitous presence of drones on the battlefield has resulted in a stalemate, highlighting the urgent need for innovative tactics; however, as new technologies emerge, similar challenges are likely to arise until effective solutions are developed to address their inherent vulnerabilities.

One of the primary changes introduced by modern technologies is the increased speed of decision-making, lethality, and precision in military operations. Autonomous drones, ground vehicles, and even naval systems are designed to execute missions with heightened accuracy, reducing collateral damage and civilian casualties. Technologies such as AI enable these systems to make real-time decisions based on rapid data and predictive analysis, allowing for tactical advantages that traditional military forces cannot achieve. The concept of "human-in-the-loop" systems, where operators retain ultimate control over critical decisions, is being complemented by increasingly autonomous systems capable of understanding complex operations independently. However, though the character of warfare is evolving, the nature remains the same – warfare is a human endeavour.

[32] Lafon, D. 2024. *How the U.S. can counter Disinformation from Russia and China.* Council on Foreign Relations. 2024.

The integration of RAS technologies has significantly altered the dynamics of battlefield Multi Domain Operations (MDO). Traditional combat roles are being redefined, as uncrewed systems take on various functions ranging from reconnaissance and surveillance to targeted strikes. This diversification allows human operators to remain remote from the frontlines, reducing their exposure to danger and shifting the focus from direct engagement to technological warfare. However, human-machine integration raises ethical concerns in warfare about accountability and the moral implications of delegating life-or-death decisions to machines, marking a significant shift in the philosophical understanding of warfare.

Additionally, the evolution of warfare is characterized by the proliferation of these advanced technologies across both state and non-state actors. As new technologies become more accessible in the future, they will level the playing field, allowing smaller states or insurgent groups to confront conventional military forces more effectively. This democratisation of warfare introduces asymmetric strategies that enhance information and the ability to influence operations using cyber and Electronic Warfare (EW), complicating traditional doctrines, and necessitating a re-evaluation of defence policies. The potential for rapid advancements in these technologies means that the NZ Army must remain vigilant and adapt quickly, ensuring that it develops strategic frameworks to remain relevant in an ever-changing environment. This also prompts a re-evaluation of international norms and regulatory frameworks governing warfare. The potential for unintended consequences and escalations in conflicts due to autonomous systems emphasises the need for comprehensive dialogue among nations regarding the ethical and legal implications of deploying such technologies. Developing guidelines that address accountability, decision-making, and engagement rules is essential to navigate the complexities introduced by autonomous warfare.

Overall, the character of warfare is evolving at an accelerated rate, due to the advent of new technologies like RAS and AI, driven by the pursuit of enhanced decision-making, precision, and lethality, improving tactical and operational efficiency, but are also increasing the intensity of conflict. However, mass, artillery, and attrition are still, and will be, prominent features of the modern land battlespace. A future-focused NZ Army must train MDO and promote a change in policy to government for the rapid acquisition of new and rapidly evolving technology platforms.

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