

Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I really appreciate this opportunity to address you today.

I thank the organisers, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Dr John Chipman, and our local hosts, the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Singapore, for the enormous efforts they have made to ensure the success of this Dialogue.

I was appointed to the New Zealand Defence portfolio towards the end of last year and this is my first Shangri-La Dialogue.

It's quickly become apparent to me that the Dialogue presents an unparalleled opportunity for interaction.

That in itself is a remarkable and positive feature of the modern security environment. The ability to bring Defence Ministers and officials together with informed public and academic commentators is evidence of the progress the region is making in building interconnectedness, as are the numerous bilateral dialogues that take place at this meeting and elsewhere.

There is common agreement that the security challenges of the 21st century are different to those of the last. While the lessons of history are instructive, rapid shifts in the economic, technological, environmental and geopolitical landscapes mean that security risks both globally and within our region will continue to evolve. The challenge is in predicting how new risks might emerge, and how they might best be mitigated.

With this in mind, I propose to offer a broad New Zealand view on our regional context, a delineation of the emerging risks, and finally some words on managing those threats.

The New Zealand context

New Zealand offers a unique perspective. Our history and culture has been shaped by a western and indigenous Polynesian heritage and a growing Asia-Pacific strand. We also pride ourselves on a healthy democratic tradition. We've always looked beyond our shores – trade and free movement of capital has been central to our growth from the time man first set foot in New Zealand right through to the 2008 signing of our Free Trade Agreement with China and beyond.

That New Zealand is a true Asia-Pacific nation is evidenced, not only by our geography, but in the many New Zealanders who claim Pacific Island and Asian heritage. It's reinforced in our strong ties at every level throughout the region. The bonds continue to increase as growing numbers of Asian migrants choose to make New Zealand their home, and our people to people links expand.

As in diplomacy and trade, our relative isolation has not impeded our willingness to engage in collective defence efforts. Indeed it has driven it. The personnel of the New Zealand Defence Force have a strong international reputation forged over the better part of two centuries of military tradition.

There are few things as fundamental to New Zealand as a commitment to the rule of law and this is reflected in our respect for and involvement in international institutions such as the United Nations. Notwithstanding some weaknesses, New Zealand views the United Nations as the principal source of legitimacy for the use of force in international affairs.

Challenges/threats (2)

Indeed we are mindful that distance no longer provides protection as threats emerge in our backyard and the wider region.

The South Pacific

The South Pacific is a fragile region. Pacific Island states have to balance high population growth rates and reliance on a limited economic base – difficulties that are compounded by the impact of globalisation and the challenges of nation-building. Economic challenges potentially create a vulnerability to external political influence. With globalisation comes a heightened risk of trans-national crime, of unsustainable resource exploitation, and of people and drug trafficking.

We're also aware that as food security becomes an increasing issue in the region, the natural resources of the South Pacific will grow in strategic importance.

Climate change will pose a disproportionate danger in the South Pacific, where people live in areas prone to sea-level rises and extreme weather events, and where there is limited national infrastructure to fall back on.

As a backdrop to this, some states in the region are wrestling with governance issues and political instability.

Asia-Pacific

Of course the wider Asia-Pacific region also has distinctive security challenges.

Not least of these is illegal migration. The unregulated movement of people has exploded as an issue over the past decade.

Criminal networks exploit vulnerable people who are driven by complex security and economic motivations to be illegally smuggled across national borders in dangerous and uncertain conditions.

New Zealand has until recently been protected from maritime smuggling ventures, but such operations are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Piracy is a related threat with an international profile.

The spectre of natural disaster, of course, is not confined to the South Pacific. Many of the nations represented here today have been affected severely in recent times.

As we develop technologically, so too do we become more vulnerable to cyber-attacks. This borderless threat is more than just a new element of modern warfare – it is becoming increasingly advanced and represents a significant threat to national interests.

Underpinning all of the discussion at this year's and previous Shangri-La Dialogues is the shift in the global distribution of economic power to Asia. That shift is not temporary, it's not superficial, it's structural.

It's a good thing for our region, but there are consequences that arise from this shift, as has been remarked yesterday. For many Asian nations, economic growth has enabled substantial military modernisation.

But the prosperity underpinning this expenditure is also a strong incentive for peace and stability.

While New Zealand is extremely optimistic, and, indeed, excited about Asia's future, we also recognise that we cannot take that positive future for granted. We, alongside others, must contribute to regional stability and prosperity.

The challenge collectively is to stay ahead of the game and engage with like-minded partners across the region to anticipate and manage emerging threats.

The approach requires a matrix of greater defence diplomacy in the region, flexible military capability, and a greater level of co-operation between different nations and their respective agencies.

Mitigation of threats (3)

South Pacific

New Zealanders expect our defence assets will support security in our immediate South Pacific neighbourhood. This expectation is shared by our partners in the Pacific Islands Forum.

And so much of the capability of our Defence Force is geared to the requirements of this vast region. Surveillance, logistics and the ability to sustain forces at a distance and over time are key drivers of our current and future defence investments. In the last 15 years, NZDF personnel have been deployed to Bougainville, the Solomon Islands, Tonga and Timor Leste.

We are a willing partner in surveillance operations, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in the Pacific region.

We participate because we want to play our part in the neighbourhood and because we recognise that there is a collective interest in a secure and prosperous Pacific in an interconnected world. That's why later this month the NZDF will be in Papua New Guinea alongside our close partners Australia, providing helicopters and vital logistics support for the general elections.

Asia/global

So how do we promote and maintain security across the region and globally?

Firstly, sustaining good bilateral defence relations with other states is essential. New Zealand has well established regional networks which provide opportunities for our forces to exercise with partners at regular intervals, in a variety of configurations and scenarios.

New Zealand has participated positively in the global campaign against terrorism alongside its partners. Our Provincial Reconstruction Team in Bamyan, now in its twentieth rotation, was the third established in Afghanistan and our Special Forces have played a major role in mentoring and supporting Afghan forces.

We have also worked with our partners as part of global anti-piracy efforts, especially in the Horn of Africa region, where we have provided a succession of New Zealand Defence Force officers to Singaporean and US vessels in the Gulf on three-month rotations.

Also of value are open and inclusive multilateral security and defence structures.

Relationships with our host, Singapore, and with Malaysia, now embodied in the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA), are very long standing.

But we also have defence and security links with all the other countries present at this Dialogue. They complement and support the wider political and economic links that we have in this region. Without a platform of security it is impossible to sustain prosperity and growth.

The ASEAN Regional Forum, the East Asia Summit, and APEC provide a framework for accommodating the diverse interests of the states of the region, build confidence between defence forces, and encourage openness.

The advent of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus) is a welcome step in this space. It fills a significant gap in the regional security architecture and the familiarity it facilitates reduces the risk of miscalculation. With its five Experts' Working Groups all very active, it is focussed on building platforms for practical cooperation in response to non-traditional security challenges such as humanitarian and natural disasters.

New Zealand is pleased to be able to play an active role in ADMM Plus, co-chairing the Peacekeeping Operations Experts' Working Group alongside the Philippines. We are especially grateful to ASEAN members who have recognised our long history of practical diplomatic and military co-operation in the region by supporting our membership in the ADMM Plus grouping.

As a charter member of the United Nations, New Zealand remains committed to the organisation. We continue to contribute to UN-mandated peace-keeping missions as a means to provide stability and security to vulnerable populations. This is underscored by our decision to send six New Zealand Defence Force personnel to Syria under the auspices of the United Nations Supervision Mission.

In response to the threat of cyber warfare, we have been upgrading our capabilities to ensure they are fit to make a contribution in international operations and exercises. We developed a National Cyber Strategy in 2011, and opened a National Cyber Office this year which will lead our international engagement on cyber security.

In relation to illegal migration, New Zealand supports a regional approach under the Bali Process to address the unregulated movement of people in the Asia-Pacific and we continue to appreciate the leadership of Indonesia and Australia as co-chairs of the Bali Process. New Zealand is also developing new legislation which will enhance our border controls.

We also recognise the value of dialogues between the major powers of the region. The relationship between the United States and China is crucial to the stability of the Asia-Pacific and we appreciated Secretary Panetta's comments on the US rebalancing to our region in his address yesterday.

For its part, New Zealand continues to develop its relationships with these two powers.

We regard the US as a very close friend. The ties between our two nations at every level are incredibly strong. Those ties are built on a broadly shared set of values and have been cemented by nearly a century of military cooperation. New Zealand has just resumed exercises with the US after a near on 3 decade break, and we welcome that engagement.

China is a nation with whom we have a strong and developing relationship. We're very proud to be the first

western nation to have signed an FTA with China; our economic future is entwined with theirs. Engagement at all levels has stepped up exponentially over the past decade.

New Zealand defence force capability

New Zealand is committed to maintaining defence capabilities that are able to flexibly respond to varied and complex threats. We are configuring our defence force so that it's fit to meet the demands of the 21st Century.

New Zealand's combat credentials have been proven time and again, most recently in Afghanistan.

Our defence force is also the only agency of state that can act on a scale that enables a significant humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operation.

A good example of the involvement of NZDF in HADR operations was the response to the February 2011 earthquake in Christchurch.

The New Zealand Defence Force, supported by its many friends in the region, played a vital role in the aftermath of the earthquake where they were able to deploy military hydrography teams to assess the integrity of wharfs, help in the delivery of relief supplies, participate in search and rescue operations, and contribute towards efforts to secure the inner-city and protect against looting.

The air bridge established in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake was also a vital artery linking Christchurch to the rest of the country.

Conclusions

In summary, New Zealand's isolation does not mean we can ignore the security challenges the rest of the world faces. Our experiences, and those of our Pacific Island partners, illustrate that real risks to our security from both traditional and non-traditional threats exist.

In response, New Zealand embraces greater diplomatic and military engagement with our partners across the region.

As a nation we seek to tackle the emerging threats of cyber, piracy and illegal migration through greater co-operation.

We also aim to foster flexible defence capabilities that complement those of our close partners.

There is very little we do in the defence space that we do on our own, whether nationally or abroad.

Hence the enormous value of coming together, as we have over the last few days, at one time, and in one place to discuss the challenges facing our shared futures