

**The Limits and Possibilities of Sino-New Zealand Defence Relations: A New Zealand Perspective**

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## Introduction

Western power has been sustained in the Asia-Pacific region by United States military might ever since the defeat of Japan. For the first time since then, China, a non-Western power, poses a challenge to that dominance, with the result that “neither Australia nor New Zealand has ever seriously considered how we would defend our interests and secure our countries in a region which was not dominated by our great and powerful Anglo-Saxon friends.”<sup>1</sup> China is the new variable in the Asia-Pacific equation, and New Zealand is now required to factor this new element into its strategic calculations for the future. China’s ascendancy in the Asia-Pacific region will have a huge impact on New Zealand’s future strategic outlook.

The purpose of this essay will be to design, as simply as possible, a way to structure thoughts and discussion about the defence relationship between New Zealand and China, from a New Zealand perspective. It will aim to establish a basic framework centred around a number of themes in order to provide a platform for analysis in the future. It will be a brief examination of how these two nations talk with each other at the defence level in the early twenty-first century.

This framework has not been established yet. New Zealand first officially recognised the People’s Republic of China (PRC) on December 22, 1972, and since this point the relationship has strengthened on all sides. This includes at the defence level. Yet despite all of these developments over the last 40 years, there is still a sense that there has not been enough analysis of this relationship so far. Very little has been done at the defence level. This is because New Zealand and China’s defence relationship is a fairly new one.

The subject of New-Zealand Chinese relations as whole needs a lot more work. In his highly informative take on the subject of growing Chinese power and its consequences for New Zealand, Michael Powles highlights this. There is currently no “detailed and authoritative study of the whole course of our [New Zealand’s] relationship with China, from the establishment of diplomatic relations in the 1970’s to the point when it had reached such a level that we were able to become the first developed country to negotiate and conclude a comprehensive free trade agreement.”<sup>2</sup> Yongjin Zhang meanwhile goes so far as to say that ignorance of the historical relationship between China and New Zealand pervades the highest levels of New Zealand’s bureaucracy and successive chains of

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh White, ‘New Zealand’s Strategic Options in the Asian Century: An Australian View,’ *Security Challenges* 7:1 (Autumn 2011): 47.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Powles, ‘The China Threat – Myth or Reality,’ *New Zealand International Review* 35:1 (January-February 2010): 24.

governments.<sup>3</sup> While this may not be entirely justified, or even currently relevant, it does point to elements of ignorance about China which still linger even in Wellington.

Anne-Marie Brady best sums up the need for cohesion of knowledge when she explains the difficulties these two countries face in engaging with each other:

“New Zealand does not have a framework of shared assumptions and common political experiences with China to draw upon in developing a subsidiary relationship with that country. Nor do we have a shared alliance structure to work out differences behind closed doors while retaining outward unity on common goals.”<sup>4</sup>

This need for a substantive academic examination into what this relationship looks like, how it has reached this point and touting possibilities about where it may head in the future is one of crucial importance to New Zealand’s current and projected strategic outlook. Beijing and Wellington require more comprehensive analysis at their disposal if they are to engage each other effectively. Yet it is a highly complex issue with many different variables.

This essay will focus on just one of these variables – the defence aspect of the relationship. This is not to say that other aspects such as economics and diplomacy are irrelevant. These variables often link in very closely with defence. Nonetheless, defence is one of the most poorly neglected aspects of the relationship. Furthermore, by concentrating in depth on defence engagement, it is hoped that this research will contribute to a greater understanding of what the wider relationship looks like in the twenty-first century.

Before studying the increasingly complex defence relationship between New Zealand and China as a single entity, it is necessary to break down the literature on that relationship into workable parts. By understanding those parts better, it will be much easier to understand how the greater relationship has been analysed as a whole.

There has been some coverage of the historical aspects of the Sino-New Zealand relationship. Ian McGibbon’s *Blue-Water Rationale: The Naval Defence of New Zealand 1914-1942* is a little deceptive in its title. On the surface it is in fact about a confined period of history, but its lessons draw much wider into the area of New Zealand’s overall strategic outlook from a historical perspective. Overall

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<sup>3</sup> Yongjin Zhang, ‘Intellectualising New Zealand Engagement with Asia’ in *New Zealand and Asia: Perceptions, Identity and Engagement*, ed. Yongjin Zhang (Auckland: Asia 2000 Foundation of New Zealand and New Zealand Asia Institute, 1999): 1

<sup>4</sup> Anne-Marie Brady, ‘New-Zealand and China: Common Points and Differences,’ *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 10:2 (December 2008):18.

McGibbon discusses how China has featured in New Zealand's strategic calculations and the time in which it served first as a focal point and then a battleground for competing power interests in the region.

Meanwhile, James Bertram's *The Shadow of a War: A New Zealander in the Far East 1939-1946* and Anne-Marie Brady's *Friend of China - The Myth of Rewi Alley* offer insight into that period in the mid-twentieth century when New Zealanders first began discussing defence issues in relation to China. In particular Rewi Alley's design and construction of the Chinese Industrial Cooperatives in the 1930's and the beginnings of the Gung Ho Movement offer an interesting beginning to defence aspects of the Sino-New Zealand relationship. The various *New Zealand in World Affairs* volumes offer a comprehensive summary of New Zealand's relations with China from the 1970's onwards, including a detailed outline in Volume Two on the events leading up to official recognition in 1972. All these works touch on elements of the Sino-New Zealand defence relationship over the years, perhaps for brief windows of time, but none of them cover the defence relationship comprehensively.

Opinions about Sino-New Zealand relations have surfaced time and again in New Zealand periodicals across the country. Some of these have been official comments, others from private citizens. They offer an interesting range of perspectives of how China fits into New Zealand's collective world picture. Once again, however, these personal opinions only offer a snapshot of how China and New Zealand work at the defence level. They must be pieced together to shed light on the greater picture.

Documents from the 1980s are particularly pertinent because of their timing – New Zealand and Chinese defence cooperation was to begin in 1987 with the visit of two RNZN frigates in Shanghai. They reveal aspects of the reasons for engagement between the two countries. The *Public Opinion Poll on Defence and Security: What New Zealanders Want*, an annex to the Report of the Defence Committee of Enquiry in 1986 offers interesting perspectives on the public's attitude towards such a hypothetical defence relationship.

This document is accompanied by the University of Otago's *New Zealand and China: The Papers of the Twenty-First Foreign Policy School*, also published in 1986. One paper of particular note is Tim Francis's 'New Zealand-China Relations' which provides insight into the possible motivations for Chinese engagement with New Zealand during the 1970's and 1980's, especially New Zealand's status as a non-threatening Western power and an absence of perceived historical injustice that marked the history of other Western powers like Britain, France or the United States.<sup>5</sup> Lin Song's

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<sup>5</sup> Tim Francis, 'New Zealand-China Relations' in *New Zealand and China: The Papers of the Twenty-First Foreign Policy School 1986*, ed. Ann Trotter (Dunedin: University of Otago, 1986): 65.

'China's Independent Foreign Policy of Peace and Sino-New Zealand Relations' brings up some interesting similarities in New Zealand and China's foreign policy which provide a good foundation for a stronger relationship.<sup>6</sup> This was a time when New Zealanders and Chinese were starting to ask questions about what formalised Sino-New Zealand relations meant for either country.

By the 1990s discussion about the strategic and defence relationship between the two countries had begun tentatively. One of the more significant documents from the 1990's includes the selection of presentations made at inaugural Chinese-New Zealand Symposium on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1996.<sup>7</sup> Although heavily bent on trade, there are essays which have a broader perspective. In particular, Huang Guifang's "Promoting China-New Zealand Relations Towards the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" and Michael Green's "New Zealand and China: Looking Ahead" directly addresses defence cooperation between the two nations and issues surrounding that debate. Huang Guifang offers an overall picture of Sino-New Zealand's relations at the time, and aligns increased defence exchange with increased economic, political and social interaction. Michael Green discusses how China will begin acting as it achieves greater influence in the region, and how New Zealand's established non-confrontational and communicative diplomatic approach can accommodate these developments. These short pieces do not provide a fuller analysis of developments, but provide an important starting point. They were written at a time when perhaps there was still very little conception that a Chinese-New Zealand defence relationship could exist, but there will be time later to discuss those elements which are brought up.

In recent times there have been efforts to explore elements of the defence relationship. Robert Ayson has looked at the implications of China's rise on New Zealand's strategic outlook in several papers. In 'China's rise: South Pacific perspectives' Ayson provides a range of similarities and differences between Australia and New Zealand's respective approaches to China's rise, which helps in distinguishing how New Zealand is developing its own unique perspective of how to deal with a rising China at the strategic level.<sup>8</sup> In 'New Zealand, Australia and the Asia-Pacific Strategic Balance: From Trade Agreements to Defence White Papers' Ayson describes the evolution of power in the Asia-Pacific region, including the role Australia has played and how this compares with New Zealand's

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<sup>6</sup> Lin Song, 'China's Independent Foreign Policy of Peace and Sino-New Zealand Relations' in *New Zealand and China: The Papers of the Twenty-First Foreign Policy School 1986*, ed. Ann Trotter (Dunedin: University of Otago, 1986):70-76.

<sup>7</sup> Tim Beal and Yongjin Zhang, eds., *New Zealand and China: Present and Future* (Wellington: Centre for Asia/Pacific Law and Business, Victoria University, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Robert Ayson, 'China's Rise: South Pacific Perspectives,' *New Zealand International Review* 36:4 (July-August 2011): 15-17.

strategic development over time.<sup>9</sup> This provides a broad context for understanding how New Zealand and China's defence relationship fits into the larger picture. Ayson's work serves as an introduction to a topic which needs a lot more work.

Ayson makes direct reference to Australian Hugh White's analysis of the strategic environment in which New Zealand and Australia find themselves. In particular 'New Zealand's Strategic Options for the Twenty-First Century' offers a neat blow-by-blow account of the general policy options available to New Zealand, including how it engages with China.<sup>10</sup> Although this piece does not address all aspects of the defence relationship generally, it goes a long way to structuring ideas about the many ways in which New Zealand can slot China into its general strategic outlook for the region and under what circumstances.

Contemporary government documents on the Chinese-New Zealand relationship generally have a deep focus on economic and political elements rather than defence aspects of the relationship. More prominent examples include *Our Future with Asia*, released in 2007, or the more recent *China Strategy* paper from 2012. The former is focused on political ties with Asia, Track II dialogue, people-to-people contacts, and economic engagement.<sup>11</sup> There is brief mention of New Zealand and China's burgeoning military relationship, ("the NZDF is building a capacity for dialogue with defence counterparts in countries such as Japan, China, Korea and Vietnam"),<sup>12</sup> but this fits into a much broader description of New Zealand's social and political engagement with Asia as a whole. This document was spawned from the 'Seriously Asia' Forum, an initiative by the Asia New Zealand Foundation to increase ties with Asia. References by political leaders to the Forum tended to have a commercial and political bias, at the cost of security and defence issues.<sup>13</sup> The *China Strategy* paper, meanwhile, is primarily economic focused and is more of a guide for New Zealand businesses to invest in China.<sup>14</sup> Nowhere in these documents is there a satisfactory coverage of the historical trajectory or the implications of defence exchange between China and New Zealand.

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Ayson, 'New Zealand, Australia and the Asia-Pacific Strategic Balance: From Trade Agreements to Defence White Papers,' *New Zealand International Review* 36:1 (January/February 2011): 2-8.

<sup>10</sup> Hugh White, 'New Zealand's Strategic Options in the Asian Century: An Australian View,' *Security Challenges* 7:1 (Autumn 2011): 45-60.

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *Our Future With Asia* (Wellington: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2007). Available at [www.mfat.govt.nz/downloads/foreign-relations/asia/asiawhitepaper.pdf](http://www.mfat.govt.nz/downloads/foreign-relations/asia/asiawhitepaper.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 23

<sup>13</sup> Robert Ayson, 'New Zealand and East Asia's Security Future,' *Outlook Series* 03 (Asian New Zealand Foundation: April 2006): 9.

<sup>14</sup> NZ Inc., *Opening Doors to China: New Zealand's 2015 Vision* (Wellington: New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2012). Available at <http://www.mfat.govt.nz/downloads/NZinc/NZInc-%20Strategy%20-%20China.pdf>

Official government documents which deal directly with the defence relationship, both from China and New Zealand, occasionally provide gems of insight.

The New Zealand Ministry of Defence's White Paper of 2010 is a suitable starting point for how China fits into New Zealand defence policy, particularly with its reference to an accommodation of China's push for influence in the region.<sup>15</sup> This comment takes on new meaning when compared with the Australian Defence White Paper of 2009 which discusses the need for China to build confidence with its neighbours as it expands its influence.<sup>16</sup> The New Zealand's White Paper's background documents also provide a standard for comparison, such as the Secretary of Defence's *Defence Assessment* which aligns itself more closely with the view taken by the Australians.<sup>17</sup> Recent policy documents, however, make no mention of the rise in bilateral defence exchange between New Zealand and China which began in the 1990's, nor set out where this developing relationship may lead.

From China's end it is more difficult to gauge New Zealand's presence in its overall defence policy outlook, given that a country the size of New Zealand naturally is just one small variable in a very large global strategic equation. Yet the Chinese Defence Ministry's White Paper from 2010 does make mention of China's annual military-to-military talks with New Zealand while fitting this into its overall foreign policy.<sup>18</sup> This is very convenient in that no New Zealand document, official or otherwise, makes any mention of these talks. This point cannot be made explicitly enough – accounts of these talks do not exist anywhere in the public forum, whether in the New Zealand media or otherwise. It would be impossible to know these talks existed in the first place were it not for Chinese initiative to make this information public. Once again, however, this is all to glean from the publicly available Chinese policy record.

Official releases and remarks by New Zealand public officials tend to offer a rather polished source of government 'feel' about a rising China in the sense that they do not typically tend to reveal the full scope of government thinking on the defence issues. Usually these comments are no more than 'soundbytes', but joined together these single ideas may offer further insight. For example, comments by current Prime Minister John Key and his predecessor Helen Clark highlight the difference in either administrations' respective stance towards defence relations with China. Clark leaned more towards the possibilities of engagement, while Key spends more time stressing the

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<sup>15</sup> New Zealand Ministry of Defence, *Defence White Paper 2010* (Wellington: Ministry of Defence, 2010): 30.

<sup>16</sup> Australian Department of Defence, *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030* (Canberra: Department of Defence, 2009): 34

<sup>17</sup> New Zealand Ministry of Defence, *Defence Assessment July 2010* (Wellington: Ministry of Defence, 2010): 16.

<sup>18</sup> Chinese Government Official Online Publication, 'China's National Defence in 2010,' March 31, 2011.

Available at [http://english.gov.cn/official/2011-03/31/content\\_1835499\\_11.htm](http://english.gov.cn/official/2011-03/31/content_1835499_11.htm)



economic aspects of the relationship at the cost of a discussion about defence.<sup>19</sup> Neither Prime Minister has apparently spent time discussing the defence relationship in depth, at a public level anyway, but their brief takes on the subject should serve to furnish an understanding of the issue.

The New Zealand media covers high-level military exchanges only sporadically, and military exercises even less so. This is evident because of the lack of media coverage occurring while these exchanges are taking place. Meanwhile, New Zealand-Chinese dialogue tends to be covered more scrupulously by the Chinese state-run media, with media outlets such as Xinhua and People's Daily regularly and consistently reporting many of the high-level defence exchanges between the two countries. The People's Liberation Army also offers a fairly regular update and tally of high-level exchanges on their website. Naval exchanges are usually covered by these outlets.

But despite these efforts there is no comprehensive description and analysis of the Sino-New Zealand defence relationship. In short, there is no document which sums up the defence relationship between the two countries. This essay humbly aims to fill that hole in the literature.

The reader will notice at this point that much of the literature here is New Zealand based. This is for several reasons. First of all, difficulties of translation and the time required to do so make an analysis of Chinese literature on the topic extraordinarily challenging. Secondly, Chinese literature on the topic is not necessarily accessible, whether for geographical reasons or due to classification problems (this is also an issue in Wellington, as it would be with any government). Thirdly, the author is a New Zealander, and will undoubtedly have an unfortunate but unavoidable subjective New Zealand stance on the issue. But rather than trying to 'solve' these 'problems', perhaps it is best to turn them on their head and use them to the advantage of the analysis. An openly New Zealand perspective on the issue of Sino-New Zealand defence relations can be taken for what it is, which can then be contrasted and compared neatly with a Chinese perspective on the issue should it ever emerge openly.

It is difficult to analyse how New Zealand and China interact at the defence level without some sort of conceptual structure around which to base ideas. It is even more difficult if knowledge of this element of the relationship is scattered among different sources.

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<sup>19</sup> John Key, 'New Zealand in the world: prime minister John Key outlines his government's approach to international affairs,' *New Zealand International Review* 35:6 (November-December 2010): 3; Prime Minister John Key, 'Foreword from Prime Minister John Key' in *Opening Doors to China: New Zealand's 2015 Vision* (Wellington: New Zealand Trade and Enterprise and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2012): 1; Rt. Hon. Helen Clark, 'Shaping Our Future Relationship' in *China and New Zealand: A Thriving Relationship Thirty Years On*, eds. James Kember and Paul Clark (Auckland: New Zealand Asia Institute, University of Auckland, 2003): 103; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 'President Hu Jintao Meets New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Elizabeth Clark,' October 27, 2003. Available at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/topics/hchf/t39179.htm>

Perhaps the simplest way of approaching this dilemma is by presenting the two following questions for debate:

What are the limits of defence engagement between the two countries?

Where do the possibilities for further engagement lie?

Following on from these questions, this essay will attempt to answer the final question:

Are Sino-New Zealand defence relations dominated by the force of limits, or more open to future possibilities?

These questions can be answered by structuring the material available into six different themes. These themes are pulled at either end by two opposing forces: the limits of defence engagement between the two countries, and the possibilities of engagement. Some of the themes are dominated by limited tendencies and others by possibilities.

The first theme is New Zealand and China's historic engagement. This relationship spans from the nineteenth century up until the present day. The whole history is pulled at by the two opposing forces of limits and possibilities. A fear of China and the 'yellow peril', dominant in New Zealand in the early days and receding ever since, distinguishes itself as a limit. Concerns about Chinese expansionism have always been a limit to further engagement. This has contrasted with a range of possibilities which have been increasing over time – the four diplomatic 'firsts' boasted about in the recent China Strategy paper sum up some of these. Additionally, since the first point of defence diplomacy between the two countries some twenty-five years ago the defence relationship has been increasing in intensity. A historical overview is necessary for some overall context as well as establishing how New Zealand and China ended up with the defence relationship they share today.

The second theme is the contemporary New Zealand-China defence relationship. This covers the exchanges which have occurred since the emergence of defence engagement in 1987. A growing economic relationship between the two countries will also be touched on, because it is inextricably linked with how either country engages each other at the defence level. From this section it will become apparent that the possibilities for engagement first and foremost emanate resoundingly from the economic world, whereas this does not appear to be reflected at a defence level. In fact, contemporary defence engagement is distinguished by its limitations. Currently New Zealand and China's defence dialogue is very much limited to high-profile military exchange, which is no certainly no exception to the rule of how China engages the world.

The third theme is a look into China's view on the world, China's foreign policy and, most importantly, the role of defence diplomacy in China's engagement with the rest of the world. Defence diplomacy is indeed an important tool in the foreign diplomacy toolkit of many modern states, and China's relationship with New Zealand is no exception – China is engaging other Western and non-Western countries, great and small, on the same level. While not an entirely unique defence relationship then, China's new security outlook which is based on establishing feelings of mutual security with global partners couples neatly with increased defence engagement with New Zealand – a continuation down this path increases the scope for dialogue at this level. At the same time the relationship possesses certain unique features which exhibit themselves as possibilities. For example, New Zealand's bid to distance itself from American foreign policy in the 1980's distinguished itself from other Western powers in Chinese eyes. New Zealand is much smaller than other Western powers, and provides opportunities for China to engage with the West with minimum risk. New Zealand provides China with the opportunity for an intermediary between itself and other larger and perhaps more intimidating Western powers. The New Zealand Defence Force, in its explicit role as an experienced peacekeeper on the international stage, is also the potential provider of this expertise to a new People's Liberation Army which seeks to increase its involvement in international peacekeeping. But how China views New Zealand its greater strategic picture is very much one theme which is balanced between the opposing forces of limitations and possibilities.

The fourth theme is New Zealand's own posture in the region and how China fits into its own strategic priorities. How is China perceived in New Zealand's own ever-evolving defence and foreign policy? What are New Zealand's motivations for engagement? This will be the time to address the references to China in official New Zealand publications and trying to fit them into an overall picture. It will necessary to look into the reason for the 'four firsts' outlined in the 2012 *China Strategy* paper and why New Zealand chose to engage China in the way it did over the last 15 years, ahead of all other Western countries. Political feasibility, which covers constituency support as well as resources available for political engagement emerges as important parts of the picture. All of these factors present a huge range of possibilities for the defence relationship, with an increasingly welcoming view in New Zealand of Chinese ascendancy in the region and what appears to be a trend in leading the West in engaging diplomatically with China. There will also be an opportunity here to discuss New Zealand's new strategic options in the twenty-first century and how a new and more dominant China will fit into New Zealand's overall plans.

The final theme in this essay addresses the theory of defence engagement between nations in the twenty-first century and sum up current ideas about how nations talk to each other. Concepts about

'common security', the various forms of 'confidence-building' and an exact understanding of what 'defence diplomacy' really means will be addressed and fitted into the analysis. This discussion will then attempt to define the current nature of the New Zealand-China defence relationship, which will sum up in simple terms the exact range of possibilities and limits for this relationship.

From all this it will be necessary to deduce some conclusions from this general arc of inquiry. Do these developments point to a rather grim picture, in which China and New Zealand are engaging in mere diplomatic pleasantries? Is 'defence diplomacy' between New Zealand and China merely a synonym for lip service? Or do the two have something to offer something far more substantial to one another? Does this relationship come with the option of deepening and entrenching? Most importantly, do New Zealand and China's engagement fall outside of the parameters provided by the idea of defence diplomacy? This research finds that there is more substance to this relationship than an initial analysis would indicate. The Sino-New Zealand defence relationship, framed by a backdrop of increasing multilateral engagement in the Asia-Pacific region is one of increasing possibilities for the future. Furthermore, it is a defence relationship which New Zealand cannot afford to demote or take lightly. Perhaps the biggest lesson to draw from this analysis will be for the need for New Zealand's defence policymakers to define not only their intentions in the region but their approaches towards the big Pacific powers. If they do not, they could find themselves in an extremely awkward strategic situation in the near future.

## Theme One – The History of New Zealand’s Relationship with China

The history of China and New Zealand’s relationship is shaped by both negative and positive aspects. It appears, however, that the more constraining aspects of the relationship are fading over time as both countries slowly come to understand each other in a world where information can be shared a lot more quickly and cheaply than in the past. The Chinese-New Zealand story now appears to be entering a new era of heightened possibilities.

Before official recognition of the PRC in December 1972, China and New Zealand did not have any semblance of an official political or economic relationship. Yet New Zealand has had contact with China well back into the nineteenth century. If there is truly a beginning point in Sino-New Zealand relations, it would have to be in 1842 when the first Chinese immigrant on record, Wong Ahpoo Hock Ting or Appo Hocton (an English-language corruption) arrived in Nelson. Eleven years later he became New Zealand’s first naturalised Chinese person.<sup>20</sup> From this time various snippets of New Zealanders’ opinions about China on issues of defence have trickled down through the years, ranging from formal publications to newspaper editorials.

Of these limited sources a few shine light on how New Zealanders have thought about China over the years, and how different people have placed China in New Zealand’s greater strategic outlook. Some of these opinions offer striking resemblances to those expressed in the twenty-first century. The fear of China, of the ‘yellow peril’, is one which has certainly resonated across the West and New Zealand is no exception.

The *Nelson Evening Standard* published an article in 1908 which probed the election platform of a new candidate vying for the seat, one Mr Harry Atmore. Atmore made brief mention of foreign affairs, but did see it fitting to mention how he saw China’s place in New Zealand’s world order:

“The Government was not giving sufficient encouragement to volunteers and defence rifle clubs. He did not believe there was any danger of New Zealand being occupied by the yellow men, but they might be subjected to raids. He did not think Japan would become aggressive, but China was a country that they might have to guard against.”<sup>21</sup>

It would be political suicide for a New Zealand MP to use such rhetoric nowadays. Perhaps of greater import, however, was that Atmore not only went on to win the Nelson seat, but to become one of

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<sup>20</sup>Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand, ‘Story – Chinese: Page 2 – The first immigrants.’ Available at <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/chinese/2>

<sup>21</sup> Nelson Evening Mail, ‘Defence’, *Nelson Evening Mail* Vol. XLII, 20<sup>th</sup> August 1908: 1.

New Zealand's longest serving Members of Parliament (until 1946), taking on various Ministerial posts during that time. Atmore even spent a brief tenure as New Zealand's Acting Prime Minister. His views on the 'yellow man' were not isolated at the time – a deep concern in New Zealand about the 'Yellow Peril' has its roots deep in New Zealand history.<sup>22</sup>

Other more obvious examples of this fear in New Zealand come from the 1950's when China emerged victorious and communist from the shackles of foreign domination and looked set to exert itself. C.J. Elder and Michael Green refer to Sino-New Zealand relations in the 1950's and the 1960's as the 'Wasted Years' – twenty-odd years that could have been spent fostering ties rather than embedded in Cold War antipathies.<sup>23</sup>

The New Zealand China Friendship Society began in 1952 but its activities were limited by public resistance to creating stronger bonds with China. Cold War fears and the Korean War were primary concerns for the public. New Zealand's allies against Japanese aggression, the 'hard-working' Chinese peasants, had been 'lost' to communist expansion in the Far East.<sup>24</sup> If there had been some sort of lingering romanticism about Chinese resistance and New Zealand's role in it, this had certainly faded by the 1950's.

In his treatise on New Zealand involvement in the Korean War, Ian McGibbon explains that this dread was truly evident in the 1950's:

“The New Zealanders arrived in Korea with many preconceived ideas about Asia. They were products of a society which had long viewed the teeming millions of Asia both with a sense of superiority and with dread. As staunch imperialist, New Zealanders had long been accustomed to regarding Asians as lesser mortals. Competing with this perception was the notion of the 'Yellow Peril', which was rooted in the fear that the developing European culture of NZ would be overwhelmed by an influx of Asians, and specifically the Chinese. This sense of a general threat from Asia remained an important undercurrent in the 1950's.”<sup>25</sup>

Asia, with its 'teeming millions', has been a source of uneasiness for a long time. But it is China that has occasionally been more of a target of New Zealand fears than any other part of Asia, a point

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<sup>22</sup> Ian McGibbon, *New Zealand and the Korean War*, Vol. I: Politics and Diplomacy (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1996): 34.

<sup>23</sup> C.J. Elder and M.F. Green, 'New Zealand and China' in *New Zealand and China: The Papers of the Twenty-First Foreign Policy School 1986*, ed. Ann Trotter (Dunedin: University of Otago, 1986):44-56.

<sup>24</sup> Alistair Shaw, 'Towards a History of the Society: The Early Years' in *NZCFS History*, New Zealand China Friendship Society. Available at <http://nzchinasociety.org.nz/nzcfs-history/>

<sup>25</sup> Ian McGibbon, *New Zealand and the Korean War*, Vol. II: Combat Operations (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1996): 162.

Atmore made over a century ago when he considered China to be the true threat emanating from Asia. As McGibbon points out, it was a fear of China which predominated in the 1950's despite a long spate of Japanese aggression in the Asia-Pacific region during the 1930's and 1940's.<sup>26</sup> This is despite the fact that China has never come close to posing a threat to New Zealand in the century since Atmore's remark.

A regional fear of a rising China was one of the original reasons for the development of the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA), effective from 1971. This was a series of bilateral agreements signed between signatories Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia and the United Kingdom to consult with each other in the event of external aggression against Malaysia and Singapore. These agreements were also designed to maintain capabilities to deter or expel this threat if necessary.<sup>27</sup> An assumption that China would pursue its interests aggressively in Southeast Asia was also one of the fundamental drivers for these exchanges.<sup>28</sup> The FPDA was soon to shed its anti-China foundations and now finds a new niche as a harbinger for cooperation on international issues such as disaster relief and humanitarian assistance,<sup>29</sup> fighting pirates in the Malacca Straits,<sup>30</sup> and containing terrorism.<sup>31</sup> This is perhaps indicative of a change in sentiment by countries in the region towards China.

But this change is not confined to Southeast Asian nations after the 1970's. After all, New Zealanders have not always been unsympathetic towards China. The possibilities for further cooperation have always existed. For example, Atmore's contemporary Wilhelm Heinrich Solf, the Governor and Chief Justice of Samoa, stated in 1909 that "the awakening of China is perfectly real, the motive being powerful patriotism, which spreads right through the people. [Solf] believes China will create both an army and a navy large enough for its own defence, but he thinks there is no fear these will be used aggressively. He does not believe China will be an aggressive Power in the Pacific."<sup>32</sup> Solf's brief press

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<sup>26</sup> Ian McGibbon, *New Zealand and the Korean War*, Vol. II: Combat Operations (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1996): 162.

<sup>27</sup> Carlyle A. Thayer, 'The Five Power Defence Arrangements: The Quiet Achiever' in *Security Challenges* 3:1 (February 2007): 79-80.

<sup>28</sup> Ian McGibbon, 'New Zealand Defence Policy from Vietnam to the Gulf' in Bruce Brown (ed.), *New Zealand in World Affairs*, Vol. III: 1972-1990, 1999: 115-6.

<sup>29</sup> Minister for International Security Strategy Gerald Howarth, Speech at the Jakarta international Defence Dialogue (JIDD), 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2011. Available at the British Ministry of Defence's website, <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/People/Speeches/MinISD/20110323JakartaInternationalDefenceDialoguejidd.htm>

<sup>30</sup> Andrew T.H. Tan, 'The Five Power Defence Arrangements: The Continuing Relevance' in *Contemporary Security Policy* 29:2 (2008): 295.

<sup>31</sup> Carlyle A. Thayer, 'The Five Power Defence Arrangements: The Quiet Achiever' in *Security Challenges* 3:1 (February 2007): 79-96.

<sup>32</sup> United Press Association, 'The Awakening of China', *Wanganui Chronicle* Vol. L, Issue 12336, 5<sup>th</sup> October

statement over a century ago could easily have been offered by a columnist in a newspaper of today as China awakens once again.

Similarly, across the Tasman, the first Australian Consul-General for China explained in 1910 that “Australia need have no fear of a sudden invasion from China, which was studying the art of peace. China was awakening to the fact that peace was for the betterment of the people.”<sup>33</sup>

These sentiments re-emerged to some extent over the next three decades, and not just through lip-service. Just prior to the outbreak of World War Two New Zealand made a remarkable foreign policy gesture towards China. When the Japanese began their invasion of China in earnest, New Zealand and the Soviet Union were the only two countries in the world to respond to the Chinese appeal at the League of Nations. Apart from signalling an important moment in the gradual independence of New Zealand foreign policy-making, Prime Minister Peter Fraser was quick to remind the British representative in New Zealand of the reason for New Zealand’s intervention on the issue:

“Though we work in the closest co-operation with the British Government, that does not mean to say that we must be prepared to swallow everything the British Government cares to put forward...if we have to choose between siding with those dictatorships or remaining true to democracy, then I hope the High Commissioner for New Zealand will never retreat from the position he took up and most certainly this Government never will.”<sup>34</sup>

Despite the mixed sentiments in New Zealand about China during the late nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries, China as a power unto itself soon slipped out of New Zealand’s strategic calculations, and would remain so until after the defeat of the Japanese. With the rise of Japan as a naval power, and the subsequent further diminution of China’s power under foreign domination of trade routes and key ports, China became less a contending power in the region and more of a battleground for influence by other powers.<sup>35</sup>

Yet even during the period of Japan’s invasion of China, New Zealand and China were to experience a sort of defence relationship as proxy allies fighting a common enemy. This association was best conjured up in the public imagination in both countries by the character of Rewi Alley, a long-time

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1909: 7.

<sup>33</sup>United Press Association, ‘No Aggressive Attitude’, *Thames Star* Vol. XLVI, Issue 10410, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1910: 4.

<sup>34</sup>*New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 1938, 251 (1 July): 133, as quoted in W. David McIntyre, *Dominion of New Zealand: Statesmen and Status 1907-1945* (Wellington: New Zealand Institute of Internal Affairs, 2007): 168.

<sup>35</sup>I.C. McGibbon, *Blue-Water Rationale: The Naval Defence of New Zealand 1914-1942* (Wellington: P.D. Hasselberg, Government Printer): 75-92.



New Zealand expatriate living in China, who became actively involved in the Communist underground movement during the 1930's. When the Japanese invaded China in 1937, Alley personally initiated and helped develop the Gong He Movement (more popularly known as Gung Ho), during which thousands of industrial cooperatives were organised across unoccupied China in order to power the fight against the Japanese occupation.<sup>36</sup> Lindsay Watt explains that Chinese recognition of Alley's efforts is no small matter, to the point where "there is no doubt that Rewi Alley put New Zealand and New Zealanders on China's map in a way that has been helpful to the New Zealand."<sup>37</sup> This has been confirmed on many occasions. Alley was known directly known to Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping attended his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party. In the post-war period his presence in China increased New Zealanders' involvement in rehabilitation efforts in China.<sup>38</sup> The Government-run CCTV station recently announced a decision to run a five-part series on the life and times of Rewi Alley.<sup>39</sup>

Some New Zealanders at the time supported the idea of a New Zealander helping the Chinese defend their territory. The Evening Post, for example was quick to sing Alley's praises.

"Mr Rewi Alley, who is probably the most famous living New Zealander, conceived and built the Chinese cooperative industrial system which is generally admitted to have immensely strengthened China's ability to continue the war against Japan and also to indicate new possibilities for the future of China."<sup>40</sup>

One Mr F. P. Bartley, a New Zealander who had lived in China for 30 years, even compared Alley's work in China to that of Lawrence of Arabia.<sup>41</sup>

Even when fighting on the Korean peninsula during the 1950's New Zealand soldiers did not harbour complete disdain for the Chinese. Ian McGibbon has pored over documents from the period to discover what the relationship between Chinese and New Zealand soldiers was like. He explains that the New Zealand experience was generally one of animosity towards the Chinese during the war and New Zealand soldiers regularly used the derogatory terms "chows" and "chinks" for Chinese

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<sup>36</sup>New Zealand China Friendship Society, 'Rewi Alley', New Zealand China Friendship Society website. Available at <http://nzchinasociety.org.nz/rewi-alley/>

<sup>37</sup> Lindsay Watt, *New Zealand and China Towards 2000* (Wellington: Institute of Policy Studies, 1992): 27.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>39</sup> China Network Television, *Journeys in Time – Rewi Alley*, Chinese Central Television, December 7, 2010. Available at <http://english.cntv.cn/program/journeysintime/20101207/109600.shtml>

<sup>40</sup>The Evening Post, 'Rewi Alley Resigns, Builder of Modern China', *Evening Post* CXXXIV: 73, September 23, 1942: 5.

<sup>41</sup>The Evening Post, "'Unconquerable" Chinese People, History of Shanghai', *Evening Post* CXXXII: 122, November 1941: 11.

soldiers.<sup>42</sup> There were also feelings of fear, of depicting the Chinese as “ant-like fanatics or screaming hordes.”<sup>43</sup> But New Zealand soldiers also had respect for their enemies’ tenacious defence and aggressive attack without support. They had huge disadvantages. As McGibbon explains, “the Chinese made war on a shoe-string, and their threadbare, though effective, quilted clothing made an impression on the New Zealanders.”<sup>44</sup>

Here we see the roots of something more substantial in how New Zealanders at least viewed the military capabilities of the Chinese. While feelings of antipathy and dread certainly existed, this did not translate into a complete disrespect of the PLA.

Fears of a potentially hostile Communist China emanated throughout the West and Western-allied countries during the early years of the Cold War, and New Zealand was no exception. Yet during the 1950’s there were significant segments of the population opposed to Prime Minister Sidney Holland’s harsh stand on China. During this time, certain New Zealand organisations such as friendship societies (the New Zealand China Friendship Society already being mentioned), church organisations, Labour MPs and certain published editorials opposed kowtowing to American foreign policy with regards to China. This stance, however, did not translate into an electoral issue and would have to wait until the 1960’s,<sup>45</sup> during which time New Zealand’s icy attitude towards the PRC thawed considerably.

At the political level, the Labour Party of New Zealand was willing to recognise the PRC’s sovereign status as early as 1952, when party leader Walter Nash announced that the Chinese were better off under a communist government than the corrupt Kuomintang regime which had ruled previously. He also announced his party’s intention to support the PRC’s admission into the United Nations.<sup>46</sup> Other foreign policy objectives, lack of political willpower within the party and an unfavourable international environment prevented Labour from pushing for PRC recognition until elected in 1972.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore National’s attitude towards the PRC did not differ markedly from Labour’s during this time.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ian McGibbon, *New Zealand and the Korean War*, Vol. I: Politics and Diplomacy (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1996): 166.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>45</sup> John Scott, ‘Recognising China’ in *New Zealand in World Affairs: Volume II 1957-1972*, ed. Malcolm McKinnon (Wellington: New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, 1991): 228.

<sup>46</sup> David McCraw, ‘Norman Kirk, the Labour Party and New Zealand’s Recognition of the People’s Republic of China’, *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 4:1 (June, 2006): 47.

<sup>47</sup> David McCraw, ‘Norman Kirk, the Labour Party’: 47-51.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-53.

The assumption of China as a threat to the region was dealt a deadly blow by Richard Nixon's memorable visit to China in 1972, during which the US and China sought some sort of rapprochement and thus undermining any anti-Chinese efforts in the region.<sup>49</sup> The US, after all, was by the far the most dominant Western player in the region and any efforts by New Zealand, Australia or the now half-committed British presence in the region to pursue anti-Chinese balancing policies in the Asia-Pacific would run contradictorily and ineffectively against America's change of stance towards China.

The story of New Zealand and Chinese relations has been one of steadily increasing possibilities over the course of time. The first step was when New Zealand first officially recognised the People's Republic of China (PRC) on December 22, 1972. The reasons for this were complex but were largely aligned with American ambitions to do so, followed closely by Australia.<sup>50</sup> Then came a gradual cementing of communication lines between the two countries, particularly with Prime Minister Robert Muldoon's visit to China in 1976 and his brief audience with Mao Zedong.

From this point in time New Zealand's and China's relationship with each other has grown steadily stronger. Demographically, New Zealanders of Chinese heritage have climbed significantly, from some 5,000 citizens in 1976 to around 140,000 today.<sup>51</sup> Sino-New Zealand diplomatic relations have improved dramatically since recognition in 1972, with many of New Zealand's Prime Ministers since then having visited the country while in office, as well as high-ranking Chinese leaders and officials coming in the other direction.

There are still some nowadays who still feel that China poses a sort of threat to New Zealand. Powles points out some New Zealand academics who pay credence to Napoleon Bonaparte's idea – "let China sleep, for when she wakes, she will rule the world."<sup>52</sup> Yet there is no consensus that either throughout New Zealand's history, or in the present day, that New Zealanders feel animosity towards China. If anything, there seems to be an ever-increasing feeling of friendliness in Sino-New Zealand relations. When it comes to establishing and building a defence relationship between the two countries, this fundamental factor is key – the New Zealand public shows no indication of putting up a barrier to defence engagement so far. Perhaps one day the public may in fact provide a source of

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<sup>49</sup> Ian McGibbon, 'New Zealand Defence Policy from Vietnam to the Gulf' in *New Zealand in World Affairs*, Vol. III: 1972-1990, ed. Bruce Brown (Wellington: New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, 1991): 115-6.

<sup>50</sup> David McCraw, 'Norman Kirk, the Labour Party': 47-51.

<sup>51</sup> Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand, 'Story – Chinese: Page 2 – The first immigrants.' Available at <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/chinese/7>

<sup>52</sup> Michael Powles, 'The China Threat – Myth or Reality,' *New Zealand International Review* 35:1 (January 2010): 20.

momentum to how the nation engages with China.

## Theme Two – The Contemporary Picture

Probably the strongest thread in the Chinese-New Zealand narrative is economic ties. It is, after all, on the economic front that interaction between the two countries has increased the most. Of all the areas for Chinese-New Zealand engagement in recent years, economic exchange is one which has opened up the most possibilities. This is best illustrated by the ‘four firsts’, which the New Zealand Government’s recently-released China Strategy paper boast as being the reason for the strong relationship New Zealand has with China.<sup>53</sup> As the *China Strategy* paper illustrates, these are as follows:

- New Zealand was the first Western country to sign a bilateral agreement with China as part of China’s bid to join the World Trade Organisation in 1997.
- It was the first developed country to acknowledge China’s market economy in 2004.
- Negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between New Zealand and China began in 2004, making New Zealand the first developed country to do so.
- Fifteen rounds of talks followed which lead to a ratification of the agreement by both governments in 2008, making New Zealand the first developed country to sign such an agreement with China.<sup>54</sup>

Contemporary literature on New Zealand-Chinese relations is primarily dominated by the economic and diplomatic aspects of the relationship, for very good reason – these have been, and still are, the primary mode by which the two nations communicate.<sup>55</sup> Current New Zealand Prime Minister John Key reiterated this point in 2010: “the New Zealand relationship with China is unquestionably and unashamedly an economic relationship.”<sup>56</sup> This indicates a certain unease of some policymakers to define the relationship as anything other than one based on economics.

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<sup>53</sup> NZ Inc., *Opening Doors to China: New Zealand’s 2015 Vision*, (Wellington: New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2012): 7. Available at <http://www.mfat.govt.nz/downloads/NZinc/NZInc-%20Strategy%20-%20China.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> ‘Pathway to the agreement,’ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade website. Available at <http://www.chinafta.govt.nz/3-Progressing-the-FTA/2-Path-to-the-agreement/index.php>

<sup>55</sup> Michael Green, ‘Three Decades of Diplomatic Relations: Expectations and Outcomes’ in *China and New Zealand: A Thriving Relationship Thirty Years On*, eds. James Kember and Paul Clark (Auckland: New Zealand Asia Institute, University of Auckland, 2003): 27-36; Anne-Marie Brady, ‘New-Zealand and China: Common Points and Differences,’ *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 10:2 (December 2008): 1-20; NZ Inc., *Opening Doors to China: New Zealand’s 2015 Vision*, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2012: 18. Available at <http://www.mfat.govt.nz/downloads/NZinc/NZInc-%20Strategy%20-%20China.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> John Key, ‘New Zealand in the world: Prime Minister John Key outlines his government’s approach to international affairs,’ *New Zealand International Review* 35:6 (November-December 2010): 3.

New Zealand and China's relationship does in one respect appear to be dominated by economic concerns, especially at New Zealand's end. As of October 2011, China was New Zealand's second-largest bilateral trading partner with trade totalling NZ\$12.7 billion in the year to October 2011. Chinese-New Zealand trade is also growing much faster than trade between New Zealand and any other country.<sup>57</sup> China is already the biggest source of New Zealand's international students, and by 2014, China will account for New Zealand's second-largest tourist market.<sup>58</sup> When compared with other elements of the relationship, such as political ties or defence exchanges, economic interests appear at the forefront of New Zealand's engagement with China. The China Strategy, a 2012 paper released by the New Zealand Government, states quite explicitly:

“The challenge is to translate an excellent political relationship and trading framework into tangible benefits for New Zealand. Our companies must be helped to harness value as well as volume from the China market.”<sup>59</sup>

Here the political relationship with China is seen, by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade at least, as a means to an end – that end being ‘tangible benefits’ with direct reference to New Zealand companies.

Yet this is only part of the story. New Zealand's share of the Chinese market is negligible, accounting for just a fraction of a percent of total Chinese trade.<sup>60</sup> This tells nothing of China's motivations for engaging with New Zealand at a defence level. What is more, exploring the economic dynamics of the relationship focuses too much on New Zealand's economic motivations for engagement. This is evidence that Key's comment does not accurately reflect the reality of the situation – it is not purely an economic relationship. It also shows that not all of the variables of the China-New Zealand relationship are well understood.

Meanwhile, New Zealand-Chinese military relations are a fairly recent phenomenon. The Economic and Commercial Counsellor's Office of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in New Zealand mentions that “before 1980, there were very few military exchanges between China and New Zealand.”<sup>61</sup> This is not entirely true – depending on how ‘military exchanges’ are defined. After all,

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<sup>57</sup> NZ Inc., *Opening Doors to China: New Zealand's 2015 Vision*, (Wellington: New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2012): 18. Available at <http://www.mfat.govt.nz/downloads/NZinc/NZInc-%20Strategy%20-%20China.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>60</sup> R Hausmann et. al., *The Atlas of Economic Complexity* (Cambridge MA: Puritan Press, 2011)

<sup>61</sup> The Economic and Commercial Counsellor's Office of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in New Zealand, ‘Bilateral Relations’, November 28, 2004. Available at

China and New Zealand were proxy enemies during the Korean War.

True military exchange in the contemporary mould would have to wait for another fifteen years after New Zealand and Chinese diplomatic relations had normalised. Although political exchanges were far more common from 1972 onwards the first military exchange appears to have been the visit of two RNZN frigates to Shanghai in July 1987.<sup>62</sup>

May 1995 seems to have been a sort of turning point. General Xu Huizi, Deputy Chief of Staff for the PLA, had talks with New Zealand's Defence Minister on an Auckland stopover. Immediately after that the PLA Deputy Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Xiong Guangkai visited on a New Zealand government invitation. During this visit he briefed government officials on China's national defence policy and exchanged views with New Zealand Defence Force officials on regional and international issues. This was the most senior military Chinese delegation to have ever visited Wellington.<sup>63</sup>

This was followed in 1996 by the visit of the Secretary of Defence Gerald Hensley to Beijing, the first ever visit by a senior official of the New Zealand armed forces to China. Crucially, it was agreed during this visit that both sides agreed to exchange resident military attachés.<sup>64</sup> In 1998 relations intensified with a number of exchanges of both sides, including between both Ministers of Defence as well as both navies. This year also marked the first time that the Chinese armed forces visited New Zealand.

These developments must be understood within the greater context of Asia-Pacific regional dialogue in the mid 1990's. Australia, New Zealand and China were engaging other Asia states in a process of increased dialogue and economic cooperation. In 1989 the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) agreement was born, and any pretences of a Cold War were soon forgotten with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue between China, the two Koreas, Japan, Russia and the US began in 1993, while the ASEAN Regional Forum, the only international

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<http://nz2.mofcom.gov.cn/aarticle/bilateralcooperation/inbrief/200411/20041100004108.html>

<sup>62</sup> Richard Jackson, 'China's Navy,' *Navy Today* 127 (November 2007):7; Fairfax New Zealand, 'Flying the flag in China' in *The Dominion Post*, October 14, 2007; Xinhua, 'China-New Zealand bilateral relations' in *China Daily*, April 3, 2006. Available at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-04/03/content\\_558411\\_5.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-04/03/content_558411_5.htm)

<sup>63</sup> Huang Guifang, 'Promoting China-New Zealand Relations Towards the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' in *New Zealand and China Present and Future*, eds. Tim Beal and Yongjin Zhang (Wellington: Centre for Asia/Pacific Law and Business, Victoria University, 1996): 204; Xinhua, 'China-New Zealand bilateral relations' in *China Daily*, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2006. Available at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-04/03/content\\_558411\\_5.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-04/03/content_558411_5.htm)

<sup>64</sup>The Economic and Commercial Counselor's Office of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in New Zealand, 'Bilateral Relations', November 28,. Available at <http://nz2.mofcom.gov.cn/aarticle/bilateralcooperation/inbrief/200411/20041100004108.html>

security forum in the Asia-Pacific, started in 1994. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, a dialogue space for China, Russia and the Central Asian republics soon followed in 1996.

This was accompanied by a change in the way the Chinese were thinking about security. New ideas emerged in Beijing around 'mutual security' or 'win-win' security, in which a country's security is guaranteed if its neighbours also feel secure.<sup>65</sup> At the level of defence cooperation, China began official annual defence talks with the US, Australia and Russia, with informal 'Track Two' talks going ahead several years before this.<sup>66</sup> Greater economic cooperation and greater defence cooperation progressed at different speeds but nonetheless fairly simultaneously as China adopted a more extroverted and deliberative approach in the Asia-Pacific. New Zealand was but one of many countries China was reaching out to.

The process of defence dialogue concurrently with high-level political exchange is now well underway between New Zealand and China. The last two years in particular have seen a rapid rise in military exchanges between China and New Zealand, usually in the form of high-profile visits between top brass officers (refer to Appendix.) Although these exchanges have an overtly diplomatic and repetitive tone to them, usually in the form of confirming a need to strengthen defence ties between the two nations without publicly announcing how this will be done, the sudden rise in the number of exchanges between the two nations is indicative of a strengthening relationship.

New Zealand's military relationship with China has been steadily increasing over the past two decades, especially from about 1998 onwards. In October 2007 a Chinese naval warship formation visited Wellington and Auckland and participated in the first joint China-New Zealand-Australia joint maritime exercise.<sup>67</sup> The relationship reached a new level of intensity in 2010 with a series of high-profile Chinese military delegations visiting New Zealand on a regular, monthly basis. The year of exchanges started in March with Foreign Minister Murray McCully's visit to Beijing to meet China's Vice Premier and Minister in charge of foreign affairs Li Keqiang for a general discussion.<sup>68</sup> This was followed a month later by a visit of the Vice-Chairman of the China People's Political Consultative

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<sup>65</sup> Susan L. Shirk, 'China's Multilateral Diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific' at the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission on "China as an Emerging Regional and Technology Power: Implications for U.S. Economic and Security Interests", February 12-13, 2004.

<sup>66</sup> Chinese Government Official Online Publication, 'China's National Defence in 2010', March 31, 2011. Available at [http://english.gov.cn/official/2011-03/31/content\\_1835499\\_11.htm](http://english.gov.cn/official/2011-03/31/content_1835499_11.htm)

<sup>67</sup> Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China, 'Guo Boxiong's visit will enhance China's military ties with Australia, New Zealand and Indonesia', May 11, 2010. Available at [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Opinion/2010-05/11/content\\_4155141.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Opinion/2010-05/11/content_4155141.htm)

<sup>68</sup> Xinhua News Agency, 'China vows to advance cooperation with New Zealand: Chinese FM', Xinhua News net website, March 24, 2010. Available at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2010-03/24/c\\_13223345.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2010-03/24/c_13223345.htm)



Conference Huang Mengfu.<sup>69</sup> This followed with ten more top-level exchanges that year, including a visit by John Key to Beijing to meet with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao.<sup>70</sup>

The most senior member of the PLA to visit New Zealand was the PLA's Chief of the General Staff Chen Bingde in September 2011. Chen met with Rhys Jones, Commander of New Zealand's Defence Force to discuss defence relations between the two countries, with Chen saying the "China-New Zealand relationship is at its best in history and the two militaries maintain a positive momentum of development."<sup>71</sup> He included that "China attaches great importance to developing military relations with New Zealand, and the Chinese military is willing to work with New Zealand to strengthen dialogue and pragmatic cooperation between the two militaries in order to promote relations to a higher level."<sup>72</sup> Meanwhile Rhys Jones mentioned that New Zealand 'prioritises' the development of military relations between the two countries, who enjoy "wide common interests."<sup>73</sup>

Yet probably the most significant exchanges between China and New Zealand have been visits by members of the Chinese Politburo to New Zealand. Members of the Politburo's 'standing committee', of which there are nine, are the most significant. This is because there is plenty of overlap between Politburo members and the PLA, with membership of one body usually coinciding or at least preceding membership of the other.<sup>74</sup> Hu Jintao, for example, currently holds three positions: President of the People's Republic of China, Chairman of the Central Military Commission, and General Secretary of the CCP.

Probably the most significant defence-related visit by a Politburo member was that of Vice Chairman of China's Central Military Commission Guo Boxiong in August 2010. He explained that New Zealand-China relations are "at an all-time high, with frequent high-level visits, increased political mutual trust and rapid growth in mutually-beneficial cooperation." Guo hoped to strengthen dialogue and exchange between the two nations' armed forces. Secretary of Defence John McKinnon explained

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<sup>69</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 'Bilateral relations.' Available at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zzjg/bmdyys/gjlb/3412/>

<sup>70</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 'Wen Jiabao Holds Talks with New Zealand Prime Minister John Key', July 7, 2010. Available at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zzjg/bmdyys/gjlb/3412/3414/t715091.htm>. For a list of all the other visits refer to the Appendix.

<sup>71</sup> Xinhua News Agency, 'China, New Zealand pledge to strengthen military cooperation,' Ministry of National Defence for the People's Republic of China website, September 6, 2011. Available at [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/DefenseNews/2011-09/06/content\\_4295637.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/DefenseNews/2011-09/06/content_4295637.htm)

<sup>72</sup> PLA Chief of General Staff Chen Bingde as quoted in Xinhua News Agency, 'China, New Zealand pledge to strengthen military cooperation,' Ministry of National Defence for the People's Republic of China website, September 6, 2011. Available at [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/DefenseNews/2011-09/06/content\\_4295637.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/DefenseNews/2011-09/06/content_4295637.htm)

<sup>73</sup> Xinhua News Agency, 'China, New Zealand pledge.'

<sup>74</sup> Derek McDougall, *Asia Pacific in World Politics* (Boulder, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007): 59.

that New Zealand hopes to “further boost military ties with China, deepen communication and exchange, and expand cooperation” for the purposes of safeguarding security in the region.<sup>75</sup>

The two most highly ranked members from within the nine-member Politburo standing committee have visited New Zealand – President Hu Jintao, and Vice-President Xi Jinping. Yet these visits were diplomatic and/or economic in nature. For example, while Xi Jinping may be the Vice-Chairman of the Central Military Commission, he visited New Zealand in a political capacity. He earmarked his momentous visit to Wellington with a ‘four point’ proposal to strengthen bilateral ties between New Zealand and China – military cooperation is not mentioned once.<sup>76</sup>

Hu Jintao’s only visit to New Zealand in 2003 was clearly in a diplomatic capacity. Exchanges between him and Prime Minister Helen Clark did not publicly touch on defence engagement once, except indirectly by stating that “the two sides should enhance consultation and coordination on regional and international issues with an eye on peace and development in the Asia-Pacific region and the whole world at large.”<sup>77</sup> This of course says nothing about what went on behind closed doors, but that sort of information can only be speculative.

The significance of Guo’s visit was that it was in his role as Vice Chairman of the State and Party Central Military Commissions – that is, in a role representing security interests.<sup>78</sup> Yet while Guo Boxiong’s visit may have been momentous to New Zealand, from a Chinese perspective the visit was part of a greater plan. Guo was on a goodwill mission in the region at the time with the purpose of expanding defence ties with Australia, New Zealand and Indonesia simultaneously.<sup>79</sup>

There is an interesting lesson to draw from these visits. Despite a steady increase in defence engagement between New Zealand and China, especially from 2010 onwards, there is no corresponding recognition of this exchange at the political level. Beijing relegates its defence conversation with New Zealand to official PLA members or, in the case of Guo Boxiong, a less influential Politburo member with primarily defence responsibilities to discuss with foreign

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<sup>75</sup> Xinhua News Agency, ‘China, New Zealand vow to boost military ties,’ People’s Daily Online in English website, September 31, 2010. Available at <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/7123163.html>

<sup>76</sup> Consulate General of the People’s Republic of China in Auckland, ‘Chinese VP hails ties with New Zealand,’ June 18, 2010. Available at <http://www.chinaconsulate.org.nz/eng/zt/XiJinpinge/t710071.htm>

<sup>77</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, ‘President Hu Jintao Meets New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Elizabeth Clark,’ October 27, 2003. Available at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/topics/hchf/t39179.htm>

<sup>78</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, ‘Bilateral Relations,’ August 22, 2011. Available at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zjzg/bmdyys/gjlb/3412/>

<sup>79</sup> Ministry of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China, ‘Guo Boxiong’s visit will enhance China’s military ties with Australia, New Zealand and Indonesia,’ May 11, 2010. Available at [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Opinion/2010-05/11/content\\_4155141.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Opinion/2010-05/11/content_4155141.htm)

counterparts. In New Zealand, Ministry of Defence or NZDF officials are the only ones to discuss defence issues with China, while politicians seem careful to avoid them.

While these sorts of high-level exchanges point to all sorts of possibilities in the defence relationship, they do not correlate to any sort of meaningful cooperation at the present time. This is indicated by the absence of operational exercises between the two countries. But it is equally apparent in the lack of media and public attention these sorts of exchanges receive. What is particularly striking about these visits is the lack of public record in New Zealand on these high-profile military exchanges. The brief mention of military exchanges in policy documents or soundbytes by high-profile individuals do not correlate evenly with media coverage. Certain moments are touched on by the New Zealand media, but seldom does there feature anything other than a rehash of a press release.

The visit of Vice Chairman of China's Central Military Commission Guo Boxiong fails to receive a mention in the *New Zealand Herald* on the day of, or after the visit.<sup>80</sup> The visit is mentioned one year later very briefly in an article concerning Prime Minister John Key's use of military helicopters for transport, stating merely that one of the RNZAF's 757s was used to transport the general to Wellington.<sup>81</sup> Unusually, the same edition of the *Herald* which features this article also features one which mentions Australia's increasing military engagement with China, explaining the flow of senior officials between the two countries including one Guo Boxiong.<sup>82</sup> The *Herald* never mentions either in this issue, or in any other, that this has also been occurring in New Zealand. The only other time that the national publication mentioned Guo Boxiong was during a visit to the United States in 2006.<sup>83</sup> Surprisingly enough, the media releases provided by the New Zealand Defence Force do not make any mention of the visit either.<sup>84</sup>

*The Dominion Post* does mention the visit in passing, saying that Guo met then Defence Minister Wayne Mapp in a restaurant where "they agreed on high-level and working level exchanges focusing on peacekeeping, disaster relief, search and rescue and landmine disposal."<sup>85</sup> There is, however, very little context provided to the reader about the visit.

There are other instances which have been better covered, but are again usually focused on aspects

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<sup>80</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> May 2010.

<sup>81</sup> Adam Bennett, 'Revealed RNZAF sorties by John Key, ministers and VIPs' in *New Zealand Herald*, April 28, 2011.

<sup>82</sup> Greg Ansley, 'Gillard woos China amid background of tension' in *New Zealand Herald*, April 28, 2011.

<sup>83</sup> Reuters, 'Top China military official visits US as ties warm' in *New Zealand Herald*, July 17, 2006.

<sup>84</sup> New Zealand Defence Force media archives for 2010. Available at <http://www.nzdf.mil.nz/news/media-releases/default.htm@y=2010.htm>

<sup>85</sup> Stacey Wood, 'Top Chinese official visits' in *The Dominion Post*, April 18, 2010.

of the relationship other than the actual substance of the discussions being held. Another example is the visit by a contingent of PLA forces, in the form of two PLA navy vessels and crew, to New Zealand's shores. *The Dominion Post* briefly mentions the visit of one of the Chinese naval vessels to New Zealand in October 2007.<sup>86</sup> The New Zealand Navy's publication *Navy Today* is more in-depth with its coverage, explaining the technical specifications of both vessels as well as more details about the visit.<sup>87</sup> The *New Zealand Herald*, meanwhile, reported an interesting story on a match between the PLA's rugby team and the Royal New Zealand Navy Barbarians at around the time of the navy's visit, which was well-attended by Chinese-New Zealanders.<sup>88</sup> This last example does not touch on the actual military exchange going on at the time but it speaks about New Zealand-Chinese military cooperation at a different, more social and perhaps even Track Three level.

Another article gives an indication of the inconsistent coverage of these events, perhaps indicative of some sort of lack of national awareness. In November 2011 *The Dominion Post* recorded the visit of PLA Navy ship *Yuan Wang 6* to Auckland, a vessel designed for the tracking spacecraft and missiles. The vessel also reportedly visited Auckland several times in 2007 to replenish supplies in during China's third human spaceflight mission.<sup>89</sup> Yet this was not mentioned in *The Dominion Post* in 2007.

This raises some interesting questions. Do defence relations between New Zealand and China occupy a high place on the agenda of either country, or are they only secondary to other interests? Or is this more a matter of a lack of media interest or knowledge on the matter of defence relations? Why is public awareness, in New Zealand at least, so minimal about this level of engagement? Where is the public debate about how New Zealand engages with China at a defence level? Despite the level and intensity of high-profile exchanges which have increased almost exponentially over time, the possibilities of meaningful engagement with China appear to be limited to 'soft' cooperation. A lack of public sentiment and media interest could be evidence of many different factors, but what it does indicate is that New Zealanders are simply not paying attention to these exchanges. A lack of public awareness and interest in a matter does not necessarily mean that matter is of no importance to a nation. But this deficiency is also a cause for suspicion that the defence dialogue between New Zealand and China may lack substance.

For the answers to these questions it will be necessary to delve deeper into China and New Zealand's respective greater strategic outlooks. A basic starting point here is identifying specific references in

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<sup>86</sup> Fairfax New Zealand, 'Chinese warship stops by on friendly visit' in *The Dominion Post*, October 12, 2007.

<sup>87</sup> Royal New Zealand Navy, 'Chinese Navy Ships Visit Auckland and Wellington,' *Navy Today* 126 (October 2007).

<sup>88</sup> James Ihaka, 'Exuberant Chinese fans bring new spirit to rugby' in *New Zealand Herald*, September, 29, 2007.

<sup>89</sup> Michael Fox, 'Chinese spacecraft tracker berthed in harbour' in *The Dominion Post*, November 25, 2011.

the policy documents and public records of either country. From there it will be easier to work outwards in order to get a better picture of what the defence aspects of this relationship look like and whether the sorts of limits and possibilities outlined here can be explained.

### Theme Three – New Zealand in China’s mind

On the surface, the Chinese view of its defence relationship with New Zealand is one which shows initial promise of strengthening. Immediately below the surface, however, it becomes immediately apparent that defence engagement with New Zealand is only part of a greater picture in the way China is engaging the world. This seems to demote the uniqueness of the Sino-New Zealand defence relationship, but not necessarily the importance of it. If anything, a genuine Chinese ambition to foster a sense of security with its neighbours may in fact serve to strengthen the relationship it has with New Zealand rather than diminish it.

Current Chinese defence policy only briefly outlines New Zealand’s military relationship with China. But New Zealand is mentioned in passing in official defence documents. The Chinese White Paper on National Defense in 2010 briefly mentions New Zealand when discussing China’s strengthening military relationship with neighbouring countries, such as Japan, the Koreas and Pakistan.<sup>90</sup> All that may be inferred from this is that China considers New Zealand a strategic ‘neighbour’, which has some value.

Probably the more pertinent point, and one which does not appear to be made in any publicly accessible New Zealand official document, is that China and New Zealand have been holding ‘strategic dialogues.’ The Chinese White Paper explains that in March 2009 and June 2010, China and New Zealand held its second and third strategic dialogues.<sup>91</sup> This would imply that the two countries are now approaching their fifth strategic dialogue. A report on the substance of these dialogues was requested by the author from Defence Ministry under the Official Information Act and was rejected by Minister Jonathan Coleman on March 12, 2012.<sup>92</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China is only slightly more revealing about the nature of these strategic consultations, explaining in its report about bilateral relations with New Zealand that in June 2010, “PLA Deputy Chief of the General Staff General Ma Xiaotian held the Third Round of China-New Zealand Military-to-Military Talks with Vice Chief of New Zealand Defense Force Rear Admiral Jack Steer in Beijing.”<sup>93</sup>

These references may seem promising but, more importantly, China’s engagement with New Zealand

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<sup>90</sup> Chinese Government Official Online Publication, ‘China’s National Defence in 2010’, March 31, 2011. Available at [http://english.gov.cn/official/2011-03/31/content\\_1835499\\_11.htm](http://english.gov.cn/official/2011-03/31/content_1835499_11.htm)

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> In a letter sent by the Defence Minister to the author on this date. The letter states that making that information available would be “likely to prejudice the security or defence of New Zealand or international relations of the Government of New Zealand.”

<sup>93</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, ‘Bilateral Relations,’ August 22, 2011. Available at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zjzg/bmdyys/gjlb/3412/>

must be viewed within the greater context of Chinese motives and intentions in defence and foreign policy. For example, between 1981 and 2001, China sent more than 1,000 military delegations abroad and hosted more than 2,000 such delegations in China.<sup>94</sup> New Zealand plays a very small part in this overall great trend, one in which Beijing is increasingly using the PLA as a tool for diplomacy.<sup>95</sup>

China's foreign policy documents must be looked at more broadly in order to understand how China views its defence relationship with New Zealand specifically. For example, on November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011, the Director of the Foreign Affairs Office at the Ministry of National Defense, Qian Lihua, announced that China planned to boost cooperation with 'foreign armies' in 2012 in order to build world peace.<sup>96</sup> In a fashion which seems to have become typical of defence diplomacy, Qian explained that the Chinese military is determined to cooperate with foreign militaries in order to bring about "mutual trust and build consensus in the area of security."<sup>97</sup>

The official online Chinese government portal explains that to date (as of March, 2011), "China has established mechanisms for defence and security consultation with 22 countries."<sup>98</sup> It makes mention of the now established Defense Consultative Talks rounds between China and the United States, concurrently with the newer Defense Policy Coordination Talks. Other countries with which China has established these defence consultation 'mechanisms' are Mongolia, Vietnam, Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, India and Pakistan.<sup>99</sup>

The report makes special mention of the 'extensive strategic consultations' that the Chinese government holds with Germany, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. While Australia, as of 2010, was already in its 12<sup>th</sup> round of 'strategic consultations' with China, New Zealand was only on its 3<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>100</sup> Put within this context, New Zealand's military relationship not only appears to be lacking in uniqueness, but also in importance. Rather, it appears that China's military diplomacy with New Zealand is a by-product of its greater diplomatic engagement not only with the West but all those countries within geographic proximity.

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<sup>94</sup> Kenneth Allen, 'China's Foreign Military Relations with Asia-Pacific,' *Journal of Contemporary China* 10 (2001): 645-62.

<sup>95</sup> David C. Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power and Order in East Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007): 88-89.

<sup>96</sup> Xinhua News Agency, 'China to further cooperate with other countries' armies,' Xinhua News Agency website, November 25, 2011. Available at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-11/25/c\\_131270177.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-11/25/c_131270177.htm)

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Chinese Government Official Online Publication, 'China's National Defence in 2010', March 31, 2011. Available at [http://english.gov.cn/official/2011-03/31/content\\_1835499\\_11.htm](http://english.gov.cn/official/2011-03/31/content_1835499_11.htm)

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

China even engages with the United States militarily, a state with which it has shared considerable geostrategic tension over the past sixty years. This is a process that has been going on much longer than defence relations between New Zealand and China. Chinese-American military relations are defined by “high-level exchange visits of defence ministers and military leaders; confidence-building measures...annual Defense Consultation Talks and port visits; and regular contacts at the functional level between the two countries ‘national defense universities and military academies.’”<sup>101</sup> This form of military exchange falls short of ‘comprehensive engagement’ – something like the United States and China shared in the 1980’s to hinder Soviet expansionism, by sharing intelligence, negotiating in private and creating mutual strategies.<sup>102</sup> The current foreign policies of both the U.S. and China clearly do not lend themselves to ‘comprehensive engagement’ with one another.<sup>103</sup> Nonetheless the two countries have engaged in even stronger military cooperation in the past than they do currently. Whether this level of cooperation can be restored remains to be seen. But if both countries have been capable of talking to each other at this level in the past, then they are capable of doing it again and this is something that cannot be ruled out.

This broader Chinese defence policy context can be seen as part of an even greater, more established idea of how China views the world, and seems to further limit the uniqueness of its defence relationship with New Zealand. At the same time, however, this idea that New Zealand is part of a more general trend in the way that China engages with the world does not necessarily limit the Sino-New Zealand defence relationship. Rather, a more accommodating China which seeks to mutually advance feelings of security with other countries is a China which will inevitably grow a stronger defence relationship with New Zealand over time.

The way China currently engages the world at the defence level is part of Beijing’s generally-held belief that “military confidence-building is an effective way to maintain national security and development, and safeguard regional peace and stability.”<sup>104</sup> This idea of confidence-building by defence means fits into the overall framework of how China engages with the world. China is marketing a new image of itself to the world and has been doing so for some time. One concept in particular has a certain resonance for China’s military relationship with other countries – the concept of “harmonious world” (*hexie shijie* – 和谐世界). Hu Jintao claimed in a Party Congress speech in

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<sup>101</sup> Jing-Dong Yuan, ‘Sino-US Military Relations Since Tiananmen: Restoration, Progress, and Pitfalls,’ *Parameters* 33.1 (2003): 51.

<sup>102</sup> Dennis V. Hickey and Lilley Kelan Lu, ‘The Future of Sino-American Military Cooperation: Challenges and Opportunities’ in *“Harmonious World” and China’s New Foreign Policy*, eds. Sujian Guo and Jean-Marc F. Blanchard (Plymouth: Lexington, 2008): 233.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 233-236.

<sup>104</sup> Chinese Government Official Online Publication, ‘China’s National Defence in 2010.’



2007 that there are five dimensions to *hexie shijie*. The security dimension is summed up as such: states should “trust each other, strengthen cooperation, settle international disputes by peaceful means rather than by war, and work together to safeguard peace and stability in the world.”<sup>105</sup>

*Hexie shijie*, an idea spawned by the current Chinese administration, is a term which has blossomed in usage over the past several years in political, diplomatic and academic circles, both in China and the West.<sup>106</sup> Despite the debate over the meaning of the concept, or foreign doubt about true Chinese intentions, the idea fits well with China’s growing multilateral approach in its military relations with foreign countries. It also fits in with the way in which it engages New Zealand at the defence level – the idea that strengthening defence cooperation with New Zealand is to the benefit of both parties.

The new Chinese approach to national and international security is one which is more aligned with a multilateral and non-confrontational stance. China’s increasing engagement with international institutions and imperatives indicates that this approach is coming into play. If Beijing’s determination to join a scree of international organisations, beginning during the 1990’s, was not evidence enough of its intentions, then its subsequent behaviour was – China’s increasing role in the United Nations and its peacekeeping missions is just one example of this.<sup>107</sup>

Michael Powles explains that while there is no clear indication as to what Chinese top officials in Beijing discuss behind closed doors, it would be ‘foolish’ to suggest that “publicly pronounced and settled doctrine is likely to have no effect on China’s future actions”<sup>108</sup>. In other words, there is no value in ignoring the publicly available rhetoric emanating from Beijing and focussing solely on Chinese actions. Hence as China continues to espouse ideas of multilateralism, cooperative security arrangements and *hexie shijie*, and the more these ideas become institutionalised in practice and entrenched in Chinese strategic thought and the way China angles its military force towards the outside world, it is easier to conceive of the possibilities of a New Zealand-Chinese military relationship within a ‘multialigned’ world.

*Hexie shijie* also seems to align with China’s deeply imbued Confucian heritage, which openly

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<sup>105</sup> Michael Powles, ‘The China Threat – Myth or Reality,’ *New Zealand International Review* 35:1 (January-February 2010): 21.

<sup>106</sup> Jean-Marc F. Blanchard and Sujian Guo, ‘Harmonious World and China’s New Foreign Policy’ in *“Harmonious World” and China’s New Foreign Policy*, eds. Sujian Guo and Jean-Marc F. Blanchard (Plymouth: Lexington, 2008): 1.

<sup>107</sup> Harry G. Gelber, *The Dragon and the Foreign Devils* (New York: Walker and Company, 2007): 419.

<sup>108</sup> Michael Powles, ‘The China Threat – Myth or Reality,’ *New Zealand International Review* 35:1 (January-February 2010): 21.

promotes orderly peace in the world.<sup>109</sup> Even those ancient Chinese schools of thought which do not fall under the Confucian umbrella advocate peace both within the realm and when dealing with the outside world. The classical anti-Confucianist scholar Mo Zi advocated a belief in non-offence, founded on the idea that the offensive use of force leads to a greater preponderance of criminal activities. Meanwhile, Taoism has for millennia consistently pushed the message of maintaining all forms of life by means of non-activity and non-intervention.<sup>110</sup>

But these ideas of 'harmony' and 'order' coexist with other ideas such as 'force', 'rule' and a certain degree of predetermination. What kind of world does Beijing consider a 'harmonious' one? Probably not one in which it is only a minor player.

In fact *hexie shijie* does not sit entirely comfortably as an accurate motive for Chinese engagement with the world. In turn, it is a concept which does not entirely guarantee a defence relationship with New Zealand which is brimming with possibilities. There is no shortage of examples where Beijing has set aside *hexie shijie* whenever it becomes an inconvenient concept. For example, at the 17<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Regional Forum in 2010 China's Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi was quoted as saying that "China is a big country and other countries are small countries, and that's just a fact." This was in response to the issue of territorial disputes in the South China Sea raised in the forum.<sup>111</sup> The implication here is that Yang is asserting China's dominance in the region and that there is little other countries there can do about it.

There are certainly enough commentators who believe that *hexie shijie* has little application, and that *realpolitik* always prevails in power dynamics. Michael Green, for example, is a proponent of power politics and prefers to see the situation from a realist angle:

"In reality, China will start behaving like a great power. Where it perceives its interests, it will act accordingly regardless of internal opinion/law, perhaps riding over weaker powers in the process. But such behaviour is not uniquely Chinese. It is characteristic of great powers, regardless of geography, nationality or culture."<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Jean-Marc F. Blanchard and Sujian Guo, 'Harmonious World and China's New Foreign Policy': 1-16.

<sup>110</sup> Sheng Ding, 'To Build A Harmonious World': China's Soft Power Wielding in the Global South' in "Harmonious World" and China's New Foreign Policy, eds. Sujian Guo and Jean-Marc F. Blanchard (Plymouth: Lexington, 2008):107.

<sup>111</sup> 'The dragon's new teeth: a rare look inside the world's biggest military expansion', *The Economist*, April 7, 2012.

<sup>112</sup> Michael Green, 'New Zealand and China: Looking Ahead' in *New Zealand and China Present and Future*, eds. Tim Beal and Yongjin Zhang (Wellington: Centre for Asia/Pacific Law and Business, Victoria University, 1996): 209

And in relation to the New Zealand-China defence relationship, Green argues that: “China is a great power with considerable scope to make life difficult for us without harming any essential interest of its own. It can do so quite effectively simply by ignoring us.”<sup>113</sup>

In this sense, Beijing’s perceived imperatives will determine how it behaves internationally, rather than some overriding concept of ‘harmony’. Or perhaps the two concepts – great power politics and harmony – are somehow aligned in China’s rise, rather than being antagonistic. David Kang explains that China has designs to build a new hierarchical order of power in Asia as a way of assimilating its pre-nineteenth century dominance of the region with increasing interdependence with Asia and the Pacific.<sup>114</sup> This is itself, however, not necessarily in opposition to the interests of other powers in the region. As Kang argues, Chinese dominance in the Asian region has historically been associated with peace and order – it is only when Chinese power dissolves when Asia turns to chaos and competition.<sup>115</sup> In this sense Chinese aspirations for regional dominance, as well as harmony, are not contradicting goals. Hierarchy and order define certain Chinese instincts. As Michael Wesley says, “the grammar and syntax of hierarchy are still very much hardwired into modern, post-revolutionary China”.<sup>116</sup>

These general ideas about China’s engagement with the world – military diplomacy, consensus-building, *hexie shijie*, regional power politics, dominance and stability, also define China’s military relationship with New Zealand. A world where *hexie shijie* dominates Chinese foreign policy aspirations is a world in which New Zealand and China will share an increasingly stronger defence relationship, one which is part of a greater trend. A world in which *hexie shijie* is used to justify other motives, or gives way to the rise of power struggles in the Asia-Pacific region, is one in which the Sino-New Zealand defence relationship will lose significance.

All of these concepts about Chinese foreign policy in general are vital for framing China’s defence engagement with New Zealand. Is this defence relationship part of an overall arc of military confidence-building by China worldwide? Is it typical of China’s bid to spread *hexie shijie*?

Or perhaps China’s greater strategic outlook doesn’t adequately explain Chinese motives for engaging with New Zealand at a defence level. Perhaps it is possible that defence engagement is

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>114</sup> David C. Kang, ‘Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks’, *International Security* 27:4 (Spring 2003): 57-85.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>116</sup> Speech by Dr Michael Wesley to the Victoria University public symposium, “New Zealand, Australia and China’s Rise,” April 7, 2011. Available at [www.asianz.org.nz](http://www.asianz.org.nz).

more accurately depicted by Yongjin Zhang's pertinent comment:

“While always at the margin of Chinese foreign policy considerations, New Zealand nevertheless occupies an interesting place in China's strategic calculus, not warranted wither by its size or its economic clout in trade and investment.”<sup>117</sup>

This accompanies a comment made by former Prime Minister Clark, who explained that the defence relationship has more grit than that typical of defence diplomacy:

“This proceeds from our commitment to regional confidence building and has been advanced by the reciprocal appointment of defence attachés. China appears to be taking the defence dialogue with New Zealand seriously, despite our differences in size and situation.”<sup>118</sup>

Given the level and intensity of engagement in the last couple of years, it appears that China is, in fact, taking this relationship seriously. After all, New Zealand now has excellent access at the highest levels of Chinese defence. This is no mean feat. And this two-way engagement is proceeding despite the enormous differences in size and strategic weight the two countries pose to each other and the world. This poses a serious conundrum – the level of attention New Zealand is receiving does not correlate to its strategic weight, in China's mind. After all, New Zealand's military capacity and capability should feature as no more than a 'blip on the radar' of Chinese global grand strategy – therefore, this military relationship should forever be relegated to the category of the shallowest form of defence diplomacy.

But this is not an accurate conclusion. Tim Francis has much to say on the possibilities of Sino-New Zealand cooperation on the defence frontier when it comes to New Zealand as being somehow 'different' from the rest of the West. He explains ways in which China sees New Zealand as more than just a military, or just a Western power. In particular, he sums up the different ways in which New Zealand appealed to China in the 1970's and 1980's, rather lucidly given that he was writing on this topic almost thirty years ago:

“What could a country of three million people, 8,000km away across the Pacific Ocean, really

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<sup>117</sup> Yongjin Zhang, 'Relationship Dynamics and Strategic Calculus: A Chinese Perspective' in *China and New Zealand: A Thriving Relationship Thirty Years On*, eds. James Kember and Paul Clark (Auckland: New Zealand Asia Institute, University of Auckland, 2003):96.

<sup>118</sup> Rt. Hon. Helen Clark, 'Shaping Our Future Relationship' in *China and New Zealand: A Thriving Relationship Thirty Years On*, eds. James Kember and Paul Clark (Auckland: New Zealand Asia Institute, University of Auckland, 2003): 103.

have to offer a nation such as China?...New Zealand, because of its very size, did not confront China with any sense of threat, real or imagined. New Zealand had no colonial or interventionist heritage in Chinese eyes to overcome as did Britain, France, or even the United States. New Zealand was a potential supplier of raw materials of importance to China, as well as being a useful, although limited, source of technical know-how. I'm sure that our being part of the Pacific region was also a factor, as was our closeness to Australia, a country with which China was also seeking to establish a new relationship."<sup>119</sup>

This explains succinctly the various ideas which will be explored here: New Zealand's unique distance from and simultaneous closeness to the rest of the West, common strands in how New Zealand and China engage the world, and China's need to access the West and how New Zealand can play a part. The fourth factor, one which Francis downplayed as 'limited' in the 1980's but which has since come to prominence, is what New Zealand can offer China in expertise – especially with peacekeeping operations.

The first point here, and one which perhaps opens up the most possibilities in the Sino-New Zealand defence relationship, is New Zealand's role as a go-between for China and the rest of the West. New Zealand is developing a niche as an intermediary between potential competitors in the Asia-Pacific region. This can be viewed through the lens of the developing US-China relationship, one which tends to set the agenda for the strategic environment of the region. In particular the relationship between a powerful traditional partner of New Zealand and a new powerful player which New Zealand could potentially forge some kind of security relationship in the future will have a great impact on the country's strategic outlook.

China's idea of New Zealand as a potential go-between has developed due to New Zealand's unique relationship with the US. This relationship, particularly from 1984 onwards, is one which is not too distant yet not too close. After New Zealand's fall out with America following the *USS Buchanan* debacle, China perceived New Zealand as a member of the "Western club", but one that it could easily engage with as means of communication with the rest of the West.<sup>120</sup> In particular, China's difficulty in engaging the US's network of established alliances in the Asia-Pacific region may have made it more amenable to countries like New Zealand which have taken a small step back from the idea of a US-led super-alliance in the region. New Zealand's unique role in the Western world creates

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<sup>119</sup> Tim Francis, 'New Zealand-China Relations' in *New Zealand and China: The Papers of the Twenty-First Foreign Policy School 1986*, ed. Ann Trotter (Dunedin: University of Otago, 1986): 65.

<sup>120</sup> Lt. Commander Andrew Law, 'Of What Benefit to China is a Good Relationship with New Zealand?' (Commandant's Papers, Massey University, 2007): 30.

value for the country as a global participant, something which China may value in the future.

Perhaps the 1999 APEC meeting, at which the Chinese and US Presidents met in Auckland after months of tension between the two countries, was symbolic of New Zealand's role as this go-between.<sup>121</sup> Although probably a coincidence, it certainly highlights an opportunity in the future for New Zealand to develop a niche in international diplomacy. This idea of New Zealand as a communicator between China and the West is one in which opens up a whole range of possibilities for the Sino-New Zealand defence relationship.

One attractive draw card for China, one which opens up many possibilities for its defence relationship with New Zealand, is New Zealand's distance from the West in terms of formal alliances. New Zealand, after all, remains the only member of the 'Western Club' not formally committed to the Western bloc either in the form of ANZUS or NATO. This fits in nicely with China's international approach. Both during and immediately following the Cold War, China has refused to follow the traditional patterns of formal, Cold War type alliances, instead choosing to advance ties with leading countries in the 'non-aligned world'.<sup>122</sup>

New Zealand remains the exception to the rule of formalised inter-Western security guarantees, bar its relationship with Australia. This cannot have gone unnoticed by China in its unique, non-formalist approach to international relations. China perceives New Zealand's foreign policy stance as a sort of buffer to American influence in the region. As Yongjin Zhang puts it:

"Given the broad strategic interests New Zealand shares in regional peace, stability and prosperity, and its track record in standing up to American pressure, China sees New Zealand as one potential force in countering the overwhelming power of the United States in the region."<sup>123</sup>

Yet Zhang wrote this comment in 2003, and developments since then have perhaps limited the significance of this statement and indicate there may be limitations to New Zealand's 'distance' from the West. The ANZUS debacle of the 1980's, for example, was not a complete collapse of ties

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<sup>121</sup> Paul Clark, 'Afterword: The Next Thirty Years' in *China and New Zealand: A Thriving Relationship Thirty Years On*, eds. James Kember and Paul Clark (Auckland: New Zealand Asia Institute, University of Auckland, 2003): 117.

<sup>122</sup> D. McDougall, *Asia Pacific in World Politics* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2007): 54, as quoted in Lt. Commander Andrew Law, 'Of What Benefit to China is a Good Relationship with New Zealand?' (Commandant's Papers, Massey University, 2007): 29

<sup>123</sup> Yongjin Zhang, 'Relationship Dynamics and Strategic Calculus: A Chinese Perspective' in *China and New Zealand: A Thriving Relationship Thirty Years On*, eds. James Kember and Paul Clark (Auckland: New Zealand Asia Institute, University of Auckland, 2003): 97.

between New Zealand and the US. It is important not to over-characterise the New Zealand ‘fallout’ with the United States over the *USS Buchanan* affair. The current US Ambassador to New Zealand David Huebner recently remarked that despite past differences between the US and New Zealand in foreign policy and security matters, the relationship between the two countries was not only still a friendship, but one which was “natural, deep and instinctive. And it’s there when one needs it the most.”<sup>124</sup>

This is all too evident in the recent signing of the Washington Declaration in June 2012. The beginning of the Declaration states quite clearly that the US and NZ will establish a “strategic partnership to shape future practical cooperation and political dialogue” and a wish to expand “existing practical defense and security cooperation activities.”<sup>125</sup> New Zealand has not signed any document with China in this regard, let alone one which comes close to an intention to formalise a security partnership sometime in the future.

The Washington Declaration is beginning to take effect – as of 2012 New Zealand and American troops have started training together, with American troops on New Zealand soil for the first time in almost 30 years.<sup>126</sup> What is more, this gradual thaw in relations between New Zealand and the US has been encouraged and applauded by Australia.<sup>127</sup> These developments would indicate there is some sort of underlying commonality between the three Western countries of the Pacific which never faded away.

New Zealand’s formal military relationships are one factor in Beijing’s calculations. But Tim Francis’ second point perhaps finds more traction for possibilities in the Sino-New Zealand defence relationship. Certain broad similarities between Beijing and Wellington’s international outlooks may neutralise to some extent any concerns about New Zealand’s traditional links with the Western powers. China has determined that its own independent foreign policy is not too far distant from New Zealand’s – an anti-nuclear country who was no longer formally committed to any potential future alliance against China. Ironically, China is a nuclear weapon-wielding power, but the former policy resonates somewhat with China’s own view that nuclear weapons only be used defensively (as

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<sup>124</sup> US Ambassador to New Zealand David Huebner, ‘US and NZ became good pals 70 years ago – let’s keep it up,’ *New Zealand Herald*, February 16, 2012.

<sup>125</sup> The Washington Declaration, signed by the Department of Defense of the United States of America and the Ministry of Defence of New Zealand, June 19, 2012.

<sup>126</sup> Audrey Young, ‘Opinion divided on NZ-US military exercises,’ *The Dominion Post*, May 14, 2012. Available at [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=10805685](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10805685)

<sup>127</sup> Three News, ‘Australia welcomes NZ-US defence accord,’ June 20, 2012. Available at <http://www.3news.co.nz/Australia-welcomes-US-NZ-defence-accord/tabid/423/articleID/258460/Default.aspx>

according to its 'No First Use' policy), and the second policy is in China's direct strategic interests.<sup>128</sup>

Lin Song explains that New Zealand and China have a number of general threads running through their foreign policy sets which they share in common: a fundamental belief in peaceful coexistence with other countries, a need for stability in the Asia-Pacific region, a commitment to the rights of each country's sovereignty, an eagerness to trade and create the conditions necessary for trade, and an interest in developing the small island countries of the South Pacific region.<sup>129</sup> While some of these themes are certainly debatable, especially the first which ties in with the discussion earlier about *hexie shijie*, these ideas do feature regularly in both countries' national discourses on foreign policy.

China is enthused by NZ's stance on regional security issues that concern China and especially for refusing to jump on the Western 'China threat' bandwagon of the mid-1990's. During this time New Zealand favoured a policy of engagement rather than containment. Early support for China's entry into WTO demonstrated that "New Zealand had its own vision of how to manage China's rise as a regional power."<sup>130</sup>

This is key. A rising power is never an easy development to digest for any country, and this is no different for the countries of the Asia-Pacific region with regards to China. While New Zealand may be equally befuddled as the next country about this change, it has nonetheless distinguished itself in its unique approach to China. Examples of this have already been mentioned – New Zealand petitioning the United Nations in 1937, or the 'four firsts' discussed in the *China Strategy* paper.

New Zealand's 'vision' of China's rise dovetails nicely with its historical relations with China. As Green puts it:

"New Zealand does not bear the burden of a colonising past with respect to China. It does not try and play power games like others, because it doesn't have that kind of weight to be effective. "Our national diplomatic style is, of necessity, constructive, pragmatic, cooperative."<sup>131</sup>

A Western country like New Zealand with these traits must seem quite appealing to a power like

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<sup>128</sup> Lt. Commander Andrew Law, 'Of What Benefit?':29-30.

<sup>129</sup> Lin Song, 'China's Independent Foreign Policy of Peace and Sino-New Zealand Relations' in *New Zealand and China: The Papers of the Twenty-First Foreign Policy School 1986*, ed. Ann Trotter (Dunedin: University of Otago, 1986):70-76.

<sup>130</sup> Yongjin Zhang, 'Relationship Dynamics and Strategic Calculus: A Chinese Perspective' in *China and New Zealand: A Thriving Relationship Thirty Years On*, eds. James Kember and Paul Clark (Auckland: New Zealand Asia Institute, University of Auckland, 2003): 97.

<sup>131</sup> Michael Green, 'New Zealand and China: Looking Ahead' in *New Zealand and China Present and Future*, eds. Tim Beal and Yongjin Zhang (Wellington: Centre for Asia/Pacific Law and Business, Victoria University, 1996): 210-11.



China which is becoming all too familiar with 'great power games', as well as a history of Western domination and humiliation. Former Prime Minister Helen Clark reiterated this concept by stating quite bluntly, with specific reference to New Zealand's defence engagement with China, that "it can also be deduced from this interaction and dialogue that our government does not see China as a threat to New Zealand's security."<sup>132</sup>

This idea of New Zealand as being a go-between for China and the larger Western nations, or having certain ideas in common with Beijing's change in vision bode well for a defence relationship between the two countries full of possibilities. At this point we come to Tim Francis' third suggestion, which is that New Zealand operates as a sort of introduction for the Chinese in engaging with the contemporary West. New Zealand is small and manageable, and because of this there are both minimum costs and risks for Beijing. A political fallout with Wellington would have a very minimum impact on Beijing's interaction with the rest of the world.

As Michael Green explains, "NZ has been useful to China during its opening up to the international community...In getting to grips with the workings of Western countries it has been helpful to China to be able to deal initially with smaller representatives of the West."<sup>133</sup> China is able to learn, through New Zealand, how a Western power operates both domestically and internationally.

But New Zealand's connection with the West offers further advantages: "New Zealand has a strong link with big western powers, as well as a modern economy, advanced technology, export orientation and high skill level."<sup>134</sup> These benefits are most tangible in an economic sense. The New Zealand China Trade Association, for example, explains how China's food needs over the foreseeable future, coupled with the economic imperative of sourcing this food domestically, are problems that New Zealanders are skilled to deal with.<sup>135</sup>

Tim Francis made one final point when he discussed the possibility of stronger strategic ties between New Zealand and China – he dismissed the idea that New Zealand would have something to offer China in terms of expertise.

One of the important products New Zealand has to offer much larger countries like China is its

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<sup>132</sup> Rt. Hon. Helen Clark, 'Shaping Our Future Relationship': 103.

<sup>133</sup> Michael Green, 'New Zealand and China: Looking Ahead' in *New Zealand and China Present and Future*, eds. Tim Beal and Yongjin Zhang (Wellington: Centre for Asia/Pacific Law and Business, Victoria University, 1996): 210-11.

<sup>134</sup> Michael Green, 'New Zealand and China: Looking Ahead': 210-11

<sup>135</sup> Tony Alexander, 'New Zealand's Role in China's Spending Shift', New Zealand China Trade Association Website. Available at <http://www.nzcta.co.nz/chinanow-commentary/1494/nzs-role-in-chinas-spending-shift/>

experience in international cooperation and dialogue at all levels. With the flourishing of international organisations, New Zealand has regularly been considered by the wider international community as a strong supporter of international proposals and multilateral initiatives.<sup>136</sup>

Daljit Singh explains that some member states in ASEAN think New Zealand is able to offer Asia a range of brilliant diplomatic products, especially in terms of negotiating international treaties.

“It possesses valuable expertise in negotiating and implementing free trade agreements, having been a path-setter in negotiating the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) as well as many bilateral and regional free trade agreements, including the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (AANZFTA)...New Zealand may not carry significant economic or security weight in Asia, but it is well regarded because of its excellent governance, strong support of global institutions and the international rule of law, and its expertise in niche areas, especially education. It is also viewed as principled and trustworthy.”<sup>137</sup>

Now to extend this idea to the defence realm. At first sight, one of the more limiting factors on the two countries’ defence relations is that New Zealand and China possess two defence forces which are enormously different in size. The People’s Liberation Army numbers well over ten million if total reserve forces are taken into account.<sup>138</sup> The New Zealand Defence Force sits at just over 10,000 personnel.<sup>139</sup> This represents a difference in factor of over a thousand. The NZDF will have a budget of around NZ\$2.7 billion for the 2013/14 period,<sup>140</sup> while *China Today*, the state-owned media outlet, says the budget for the PLA in 2010 was around NZ\$100 billion.<sup>141</sup> This is nothing less than a highly asymmetric defence relationship.

Initially this does not seem to bode well for the defence relationship – in terms of sheer military might, New Zealand would barely be a factor in China’s strategic calculations. Robert Ayson sums up the relationship between the NZDF’s capabilities and the evolving Asia-Pacific strategic environment when he explains that New Zealand lacks the “defence capabilities useful in a stoush between the

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<sup>136</sup> Robert Pattman, ‘Sovereignty, Globalisation and New Zealand Foreign Policy’ in *New Zealand in a Globalising World*, ed. Ralph Pettman, (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2005): 44-64.

<sup>137</sup> Daljit Singh, ‘ASEAN’s Perspective of New Zealand’s Place in Asia,’ *Outlook 2011 Series: New Zealand’s Place in Asia* (Wellington: Asia New Zealand Foundation, October 2011): 7.

<sup>138</sup> ‘China’s Military and Armed Forces (People’s Liberation Army, PLA) on China Today website. Available at <http://www.chinatoday.com/arm/>

<sup>139</sup> New Zealand Defence Force website. Available at <http://www.nzdf.mil.nz/>

<sup>140</sup> Rhys Jones, ‘Introduction’ in *the 2012-2015 Statement of Intent* (Wellington: New Zealand Defence Force Headquarters, 2012): 5.

<sup>141</sup> ‘China’s Military and Armed Forces (People’s Liberation Army, PLA) on China Today website. Available at <http://www.chinatoday.com/arm/>

region's major powers," in stark comparison with much more advanced Australian capabilities.<sup>142</sup>

But sheer military might is not the sole determining factor in modern defence relations. First of all, it must be remembered that limited military capabilities may work in New Zealand's favour – much as New Zealand presents itself to China as a less confrontational, less aggressive Western intermediary in the region, so too does the NZDF's limited size pose much less of a threat than other militaries in the region. This ties in with New Zealand presenting itself as one of the more approachable Western nations.

What is more, the New Zealand Defence Force plays a key role in developing New Zealand's foreign policy initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region. This is something China may be interested in. The NZDF has performed in various tasks the Pacific region ranging from humanitarian assistance to peacekeeping operations. This important and distinguishing feature of the NZDF is stated briefly in MFAT's *Our Future with Asia* paper – one of New Zealand's many assets is "a professional defence force with well-established links in the region."<sup>143</sup>

The NZDF has played an important part in creating New Zealand's niche as an engaged, multilateral international player. The New Zealand Defence Force's Statement of Intent for 2011-2014 states quite explicitly that the NZDF plays a leading or supporting role in the New Zealand government's national security interests, in roles such as "enforcing a rules-based international order, which respects national sovereignty; a network of strong international linkages; and a sound global economy underpinned by open trade routes."<sup>144</sup>

As the Statement explains, these roles assigned for NZDF are for very practical reasons – "New Zealand must trade to survive. It needs stable partners with growing economies," and free access to Asia-Pacific economies. Instability in the region can have detrimental effects on New Zealand.<sup>145</sup> There is no reason to suggest that China is not interested in all of these goals. While a nation the size of China has many priorities which go well beyond the scope of New Zealand's, it does not seem inappropriate to suggest that it would be interested in moulding the capabilities of its own defence force to meet these criteria.

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<sup>142</sup> Robert Ayson, 'Rise of Chinese Dragon could divide Australia and New Zealand,' *New Zealand Herald*, April 20, 2011.

<sup>143</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Our Future with Asia* (Wellington: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2007): 22.

<sup>144</sup> New Zealand Defence Force, *Statement of Intent 2011-2014* (Wellington: New Zealand Defence Force Headquarters, 2011): 8.

<sup>145</sup> New Zealand Defence Force, *Statement of Intent 2011-2014*: 9.

But the New Zealand Defence Force has much more to offer than experience in the arena of international politics. Helen Clark pointed out the many opportunities for Chinese and New Zealand interaction at the defence level. For example, there has been good progress in mutual benefits, such as cooperation between military education institutions and exchange of information through regular seminars and dialogues. There is also the potential for further development in 'niche areas' such as logistics management, peacekeeping operations (PKO) techniques, demining, language training and personnel exchanges. She summed up this developing situation: "While our security outlooks and defence priorities are very different, and while there is clearly a vast disparity in the relative sizes of our military establishments, there is ample scope for more interaction."<sup>146</sup> From the Chinese side, the *People's Daily* mentioned that peacekeeping was one of the key areas for discussion in the Third Strategic Military-to-Military Consultation between China and New Zealand in June 2010, alongside personnel training and academic exchanges.<sup>147</sup> Another skill which blends into this idea is the NZDF's contribution to and experience with disaster relief management,<sup>148</sup> a whole different skill set which the force has developed with time and experience.

When Chief of the General Staff for the PLA Chen Bingde visited New Zealand in September 2011, he discussed these opportunities for exchange with NZDF Commander Rhys Jones. Four of these opportunities were explicitly mentioned: peacekeeping, fighting pirates, humanitarian assistance and disaster reduction.<sup>149</sup> This emphasis on peacekeeping had been mentioned a year earlier when Guo Boxiong, vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission, visited Wellington. Boxiong told then Defence Minister Wayne Mapp that he was particularly interested in New Zealand's expertise in peacekeeping.<sup>150</sup>

Even earlier than this, however, there were signs that peacekeeping may be a field in which New Zealand can cooperate strongly with China. Aside from easing Sino-American tensions that year, the Auckland APEC Summit in 1999 was also the event for another important discussion – that between China and various UN members on the nuts-and-bolts of Chinese involvement in the peacekeeping effort in East Timor.<sup>151</sup> These issues were addressed at an emergency meeting held by New Zealand's

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<sup>146</sup> Rt. Hon. Helen Clark, 'Shaping Our Future Relationship': 103.

<sup>147</sup> People's Daily Online, 'Chinese defence minister hails talks with New Zealand armed forces,' June 2, 2010. Available at <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/7010106.html>

<sup>148</sup> Daljit Singh, 'ASEAN's Perspective of New Zealand's Place in Asia,' *Outlook 2011 Series: New Zealand's Place in Asia* (Wellington: Asia New Zealand Foundation, October 2011): 6.

<sup>149</sup> Dong Zhaohui, 'China, New Zealand pledge to strengthen military cooperation,' People's Liberation Army website, September 6, 2011. Available at [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2011-09/06/content\\_4667913.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2011-09/06/content_4667913.htm)

<sup>150</sup> Stacey Wood, 'Top Chinese official visits,' *The Dominion Post*, May 18, 2010.

<sup>151</sup> 'APEC Leaders to Confer on East Timor as Jakarta Bows before Pressure,' Agence France Presse,

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.<sup>152</sup> This not only ties in nicely with the idea of New Zealand's role as an intermediary between larger Pacific powers, but also emphasises the role New Zealand has to play in international peacekeeping.

Following on from these discussions in Auckland, China participated in the UN Transitional Administration (UNTAET) in East Timor, sending a small armed police contingent to aid in the transition. This was a new experience for China in that it was possibly the most interventionist peacekeeping role China had yet taken part of given its strong Cold War commitment to absolute sovereignty and non-interventionism.<sup>153</sup> East Timor was indeed a watershed for the Chinese – this was the first time Chinese security forces, namely the People's Armed Police, had operated under an international body rather than Beijing.<sup>154</sup> New Zealand, meanwhile, had decades-long involvement and experience in United Nations peacekeeping, participating in many of the UN's peacekeeping mission ever since the organisation's inception. Wellington's role as chair of the meeting was perhaps symbolic of this experience.

The Chinese peacekeeping machine is now a sizeable affair – it is now the largest provider of UN peace forces of all five UN Security Council members.<sup>155</sup> This stems much more from a belief in settling disputes and stemming violence – it also has very much to do with Beijing projecting an image to the world of being a 'responsible' power, as well as exerting its 'soft' power capabilities in those regions of the globe where it has interests.<sup>156</sup>

Yet despite the talk, Beijing and Wellington have not yet cooperated on peacekeeping. It must be kept in mind that discussions about this sort of peacekeeping have only just begun, and China is still tentatively testing its new role as a potential international arbiter of disputes. But these developments in both Chinese grand strategy and New Zealand operational expertise present

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<sup>12</sup>th September 1999. Referenced in Marc Lanteigne, 'A Change in Perspective: China's Engagement in the East Timor UN Peacekeeping Operations,' *International Peacekeeping* 18:3 (2011): 320.

<sup>152</sup> Interview conducted by Marc Lanteigne with MFAT official, August 2010, referenced in Marc Lanteigne, 'A Change in Perspective: China's Engagement in the East Timor UN Peacekeeping Operations' in *International Peacekeeping* 18:3 (2011): 320.

<sup>153</sup> Interview conducted by Marc Lanteigne with MFAT official, August 2010, referenced in Marc Lanteigne, 'A Change in Perspective: China's Engagement in the East Timor UN Peacekeeping Operations' in *International Peacekeeping* 18:3 (2011): 313-327.

<sup>154</sup> Marc Lanteigne, 'A Change in Perspective: China's Engagement in the East Timor UN Peacekeeping Operations' in *International Peacekeeping* 18:3 (2011): 323.

<sup>155</sup> Miwa Hirono and Marc Lanteigne, 'Introduction: China and UN Peacekeeping' in *International Peacekeeping* 18:3 (2011): 243.

<sup>156</sup> Bobby Ling, 'China's Peacekeeping Diplomacy' in *China Rights Forum* 1 (2007): 47-8; International Crisis Group, 'China's Growing Role in UN Peacekeeping' in *Asia Report* 166 (April 17, 2009): 1-32; Marc Lanteigne, 'A Change in Perspective: China's Engagement in the East Timor UN Peacekeeping Operations' in *International Peacekeeping* 18:3 (2011): 325.

themselves as a sort of interesting possibility to further defence cooperation, and intertwine with New Zealand's potential development as an intermediary mouthpiece. The lack of genuine, 'hard' cooperation between the Chinese and New Zealand defence forces, which does not correlate with the intensity of high-level military exchange, is something which poses itself as a limitation to further cooperation. Another point to draw from this discussion is how Chinese grand strategy in the twenty-first century engages Beijing with a range of countries at the highest levels of defence. While New Zealand is certainly no exception to this rule, this does not limit the importance of the Sino-New Zealand defence relationship. Rather, it opens up a whole range of possibilities for further defence cooperation between the two countries. But whether China's idea of New Zealand further limits defence cooperation between the two countries, or expands possibilities for stronger ties, is very much a story which is yet to be told.

#### **Theme Four – China in New Zealand’s mind**

The other equally important side of the defence relationship is how New Zealand fits China into its strategic calculations. Like the other themes in this essay, this one is divided between the opposing forces of limitations and possibilities.

There are four parts to this theme: the presence of China in contemporary New Zealand defence policy, a rather constraining part of the relationship; the political and public will to establish a defence relationship with China – while there is no drive here to strengthen relations, there also appears to be little resistance to doing so; NZDF capabilities and how these fit into a defence partnership with China; and how an ascendant China fits into New Zealand’s strategic options for the future. Depending on projected future scenarios in the Asia-Pacific region, this last topic is perhaps the most speculative but points to how the China-New Zealand defence relationship would pan out given different sets of contingencies.

Due to the asymmetrical defence relationship, China is much more present in New Zealand’s defence policy than New Zealand is in China’s. New Zealand’s defence and foreign policy has been more explicit in describing how the two defence forces interact and what this means for the greater relationship.

The recent ‘China Strategy’ paper, *Opening Doors to China: New Zealand’s 2015 Vision* released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade offers some ‘starter’ perspectives on New Zealand’s security relationship with China. In the foreword Prime Minister John Key explains that the purpose of the publication is to set up a “whole-of-government approach” in dealing with China.<sup>157</sup> This of course implies that role of defence in the New Zealand-China relationship is just one part of a greater drive for closer economic and political ties.

But the paper further downplays the role of defence in favour of this more ‘holistic’ understanding of engagement with China by claiming that the Government’s bid to enhance relations between the two countries is “part of a broad government strategy to increase the internationalisation of the New Zealand economy... [which] supports the Government’s main goal to deliver greater prosperity, security and opportunity for all New Zealanders.”<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Prime Minister John Key, ‘Foreword from Prime Minister John Key’ in *Opening Doors to China: New Zealand’s 2015 Vision* (Wellington: New Zealand Trade and Enterprise and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2012): 1.

<sup>158</sup> New Zealand Trade and Enterprise and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, ‘The New Zealand Inc. China Strategy’ in *Opening Doors to China: New Zealand’s 2015 Vision* (Wellington: New Zealand Trade and Enterprise

The first goal of the China Strategy paper is to “retain and build a strong and resilient political relationship with China.” This is because “China is of central political and strategic importance to Asia-Pacific and globally...It is important that, in dealings with China, New Zealanders’ interests are understood, protected and advanced.”<sup>159</sup> Following on from this are five suggestions as to how New Zealand can do this: the fifth suggestion is to “strengthen and maximise areas of cooperation between security and law enforcement agencies in New Zealand and China.”<sup>160</sup> This, interestingly enough, ties in the need for greater security engagement between the two countries as a means to secure stronger economic ties. Yet while these documents continuously stress this important point, they do not go into much detail on the exact specifications of Chinese-New Zealand defence dialogue.

Current defence policy can provide more information. The latest New Zealand Defence White Paper, the first of its kind in over a decade, makes mention of the value placed on all of New Zealand’s existing relationships, by explaining that “peace and security in East Asia rests significantly on the actions of the major powers. Of these, China, Japan, Korea, and the US are pivotal — and all are important relationships for New Zealand.”<sup>161</sup> No distinction appears to be made between the two major players in the Asia-Pacific region.

This seems to be complemented by the document’s acknowledgement, and perhaps even acquiescence, of growing Chinese power in the region:

“The strategic balance in North Asia is shifting. China both benefits from and contributes to regional stability and prosperity, but there will be a natural tendency for it to define and pursue its interests in a more forthright way on the back of growing wealth and power. The pace of China’s military modernisation and force projection programme, and the response this could prompt from neighbouring states, may test the relationships of the major regional powers.”<sup>162</sup>

These statements do not commit New Zealand to any further strengthening of ties with China, but there is certainly no sense of precluding the possibility. This official defence policy statement was further buttressed in a recent speech by New Zealand’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Murray McCully, in which he explains that he does not consider greater Chinese engagement in the region as “a great

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and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2012): 15.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>161</sup> New Zealand Ministry of Defence, *Defence White Paper 2010* (Wellington: Ministry of Defence, 2010): 19.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 30.



mystery”, nor inspired by “unwholesome motives.” Rather, he advances that “China is simply doing in our neighbourhood what it is doing in every neighbourhood around the globe: undertaking a level of engagement designed to secure access to resources on a scale that will meet its future needs, and establishing a presence through which it can make its other interests clear.”<sup>163</sup> Presumably McCully is referring to the South Pacific when he uses the term ‘our neighbourhood.’

There is evidence here of a certain accommodation by New Zealand policymakers: identifying a ‘natural’ tendency is indication of a certain acceptance of growing Chinese power. It implies a certain willingness to accommodate this growth, because to oppose it would be ‘unnatural’ or distasteful. Compare this to the contemporaneous Australian defence policy paper of 2009:

“A major power of China's stature can be expected to develop a globally significant military capability befitting its size. But the pace, scope and structure of China's military modernisation have the potential to give its neighbours cause for concern if not carefully explained, and if China does not reach out to others to build confidence regarding its military plans.”<sup>164</sup>

The document explains that China’s growing military capabilities are to be ‘expected’, followed by a resounding ‘but’, imposing on China a condition of increased strength – it ought to increase confidence amongst its neighbours. New Zealand’s document uses no such prerequisite for ‘naturally’ growing Chinese power.

This sense of defining China’s rise and need to ‘pursue its interests’ as ‘natural’ signifies a certain acceptance of Chinese power and opens up possibilities in New Zealand’s defence relationship with China. But the New Zealand White Paper mentions nothing of New Zealand and China’s existing or projected military relationship. Furthermore, when comparing these brief comments about China to those made about New Zealand’s ‘traditional allies’, it seems that an accommodation of China pales in comparison to how New Zealand feels about its existing security relationships. The document argues that;

“Economic weight is shifting. New technologies are emerging, capable of narrowing some

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<sup>163</sup> Speech presented Minister of Foreign Affairs Murray McCully at Asia:NZ Foundation Symposium, ‘New Zealand, Australia and China’s Rise’, Victoria University, Wellington, April 7, 2011. Available at <http://www.asianz.org.nz/our-work/track-ii/track-ii-dialogues/michael-wesley-nz>

<sup>164</sup> Australian Department of Defence, *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030* (Canberra: Department of Defence, 2009): 34.

aspects of the military advantage enjoyed by New Zealand's traditional partners."<sup>165</sup>

If there was any need for clarification about who these partners were, four of them are mentioned explicitly earlier on:

"Most notably, New Zealand has longstanding and close security partnerships with Australia, the US, the United Kingdom, and Canada." This comment is footnoted to indicate that "this was recognised by the majority of respondents to the public consultation."<sup>166</sup>

This seems to confirm that not only is this the view of policymakers responsible for these types of documents, but the New Zealand public in general. But to further confirm the value of these established relationships, the document goes even further:

"These partnerships are grounded in common traditions, experiences, and values. They are maintained and strengthened by dialogue, personnel exchanges, training, exercises, technology transfer, intelligence sharing, and the application of military doctrine. They are made concrete by the sharing of risk in operations around the globe. These various connections magnify the capabilities of the NZDF and will remain valuable to New Zealand in the future."<sup>167</sup>

There is no mention here of 'dialogue' with China, even though the Chinese White Paper of the same year explicitly states that a defence conversation was well on its way between New Zealand and China. Not only was 2010, the year of this White Paper's release, also the year of a record number of military-to-military talks between the PLA and the NZDF, but the two countries were already in the third round of military-to-military strategic dialogues, as mentioned in the Chinese White Paper of the same year.

In a final note, the New Zealand White Paper makes specific reference to the warming defence relationship with the US, in terms that almost sound as if ANZUS was still a functioning treaty and the 1980's fallout had never happened:

"Our security also benefits from New Zealand being an engaged, active, and stalwart partner of the US. The recent US review of bilateral defence relations was welcome. Consistent with the many interests and values shared by New Zealand and the US, there has been a steady

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<sup>165</sup> New Zealand Ministry of Defence, *Defence White Paper 2010* (Wellington: Ministry of Defence, 2010): 23.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

increase in military contact and co-operation between us.”<sup>168</sup>

As Ayson points out, the New Zealand White Paper does not accurately sum up the current New Zealand policy approach towards China. The Ministry of Defence’s *Defence Assessment* of 2010, one of the key background documents to the White Paper is much more cautious in its approach to Chinese ascendancy.<sup>169</sup> There is no indication of a positive aspect to China’s rise when the *Assessment* states that:

“The rise of China is changing the strategic balance, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. New and evolving international and regional institutions will come under pressure as they try to accommodate a more prominent China.”<sup>170</sup>

This sort of comment seems to align more comfortably with the White Paper’s subtle omission of the Sino-New Zealand defence dialogue, and inclusion of comments on the US-New Zealand defence relationship.

But the *Assessment* takes this idea one step further by raising New Zealand’s stance in a future scenario where there were heightened Sino-US tensions in the region

“Strategic rivalry between China and the US is not inevitable, but a wariness of each other’s intentions could manifest itself in their decisions on force structure and capabilities.”<sup>171</sup>

This statement would imply that New Zealand is adopting a fairly nonaligned status, if it weren’t for the following paragraph:

“New Zealand is an engaged, active and stalwart friend of the United States. Consistent with the many shared interests and values between New Zealand and the United States, there has been a welcome increase in military contact and cooperation between us.”<sup>172</sup>

That is to say, immediately after mentioning the possibilities of strategic conflict between the US and China, the *Assessment* stresses New Zealand’s ‘stalwart’ friendship with the United States, of which there has been a ‘welcome increase’ in military cooperation. This is a significant departure from that idea that New Zealand perceives China’s rise as ‘natural’.

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<sup>168</sup> New Zealand Ministry of Defence, *Defence White Paper 2010*: 19.

<sup>169</sup> Robert Ayson, ‘Force and Statecraft: Strategic Objectives and Relationships in New Zealand’s 2010 Defence White Paper,’ *Security Challenges* 7:1 (Autumn 2011): 26-7.

<sup>170</sup> New Zealand Ministry of Defence, *Defence Assessment July 2010* (Wellington: Ministry of Defence, 2010): 16.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

While the *Defence Assessment* recognises China's effort to be a "responsible international citizen", and that its absorption into the international system will abet this process further, China's growing military power may lead to tensions in the region. It acknowledges that "there is an outside possibility of conflict in North Asia in the timeframe of this Assessment. This could be precipitated by a dispute in China's maritime periphery."<sup>173</sup>

These statements seem to conflict with the White Paper's 'natural' comment, indicating that mixed feelings about China still exist in the New Zealand mindset, even at the highest levels of government. China's rise is perhaps one which need not be taken as a threat. Nonetheless, New Zealand looks quite clearly to Australia and the United States for support and friendship. Any calculations about how New Zealand and China can cooperate more closely in defence are potentially limited by this obvious caution and indecision on the matter.

But a nation's defence policy is not the only factor when considering how militaries interact. Defence policy certainly reflects the feelings of the administration in power at the time – National, for example, has always had a tendency to look towards its more established relationships for security, whereas Labour has opted for a more non-aligned stance over the years. Strategy penetrates all aspects of a state's existence, right down to its true core – the sentiments of its public as determined by its history as well as those more whimsical sociological trends which tend to seize a nation's interest momentarily from time to time.

This is why it is vital to incorporate the New Zealand public's perceptions of how a security arrangement with China fits in to the collective value set when considering potential strategic engagement scenarios between the two countries.

In an Asia New Zealand Institute-commissioned study from 2011, the latest in a series of studies conducted about New Zealanders' perceptions of Asia, the New Zealand public appeared to have an overall favourable impression of China as country and most did not consider China a threat. 33% of New Zealanders said that New Zealand would be harmed if China gained more power and in the world, while about 22% thought this about India. 29% of New Zealanders thought it likely that China will become a military threat to New Zealand in the next 20 years, while 66% believed it was unlikely.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> New Zealand Ministry of Defence, *Defence Assessment July 2010*: 17-18.

<sup>174</sup> Colmar Brunton, 'New Zealanders' Perceptions of Asia and Asian Peoples,' *Asia New Zealand Foundation: Building New Zealand's Knowledge and Understanding of Asia*, Asia:NZ website, 2011:5. Available at [http://www.asianz.org.nz/sites/asianz.org.nz/files/Asia\\_NZ\\_perceptions\\_of\\_asia\\_report\\_2011\\_final.pdf](http://www.asianz.org.nz/sites/asianz.org.nz/files/Asia_NZ_perceptions_of_asia_report_2011_final.pdf)

On a scale of how New Zealanders felt towards China, ranging from 0 being 'very cold and unfavourable' and 100 being 'very warm and favourable', a sample size of around 1000 New Zealanders ranked China about 70. This has been consistent in yearly surveys since 2008.<sup>175</sup> In Australia this figure was 54 in 2011.<sup>176</sup>

This bodes well for a Sino-New Zealand defence relationship – it appears that there is no significant antipathy towards China. At the defence level a clear majority believe that China does not pose a threat to New Zealand.

There may have been indications of resistance in New Zealand political circles towards closer relations with China in the past. Unfortunately the issue of defence relations with China has not yet entered the House of Representatives – as of yet, there has been no formal defence agreement between New Zealand and China to debate. On the other hand, New Zealand politicians seldom debate any of its relationships with other countries – the recent Washington Declaration, for one, did not go through Parliament. This is because documents such as the Declaration are not formal defence agreements as such so there is no legal requirement for them to do so. But because of this there may be a need to venture a little further afield to deduce from what parts of the political spectrum anti-Chinese sentiment may emanate.

Voting on the Free Trade Agreement Bill with China is perhaps a good indication of parliamentary feelings about China. The main parties voted in favour of the agreement, but the Greens, the Maori party and New Zealand First opposed the deal.<sup>177</sup> The Green party in particular have indicated their displeasure with growing Chinese investment in New Zealand. When Politburo Standing Committee member Jia Qinglin visited Wellington in April 2012, Greens party co-leader Russel Norman was quick to speak out against the deal signed by the National government to sell large tracts of farmland to Chinese-owned company Shanghai Pengxin:

"The Chinese government has laid down a clear challenge to the sovereignty of the New Zealand government ... the only question is whether this National government has the courage to say 'no'."<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>177</sup> Hansard, 'Journals of the House for the week beginning Tuesday, July 22, 2008' in *Journals of the House*. Available at <http://www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/PB/Debates/Journals/b/c/7/48HOHJournals200807221-Journals-of-the-House-for-the-week-beginning.htm>

<sup>178</sup> New Zealand Newswire, 'PM rejects Greens' China pressure claim,' TV3 News website, April 16, 2012. Available at <http://www.3news.co.nz/PM-rejects-Greens-China-pressure->

Yet the FTA is only one prism through which to view political willpower for closer defence relations with China. For one, it deals purely with an economic matter – the Greens and the Maori party may have opposed this bill more on the grounds of defending New Zealand-owned assets rather than because they were opposed to engaging with China. On the whole, however, there does not yet appear to be any indication that the New Zealand public will pose a limit to defence engagement. But in the same measure nor does there appear to be a driving force coming from Parliament or the public to strengthen defence ties between the two countries.

This is a good time to consider the more practical side of military engagement with Beijing, from New Zealand’s point of view. This is how intentions of a defence relationship between New Zealand and China match NZDF capabilities now and into the near future. In what ways can New Zealand glean strategic value from the limited capabilities of its defence forces, especially in its defence relationship with China?

The Ministry of Defence’s *Defence Capability Plan*, released in 2011, works as a follow-on document from the 2010 White Paper and its subsidiary documents like the 2010 Defence Assessment. In terms of NZDF capabilities, the Plan explicitly states that the Government expects the NZDF to be able to perform a range of tasks within the next 25 years. Of the five priorities, below defending New Zealand’s sovereignty, meeting the security obligations New Zealand shares with Australia, and contributing to the security of the South Pacific region, the Government expects the NZDF to be able to “make a credible contribution in support of peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region.”<sup>179</sup> This matches the order in which New Zealand’s strategic priorities are outlined at the beginning of the White Paper.

One of the key obstacles to New Zealand forging new security arrangements with China are the limits of the NZDF’s capabilities. New Zealand’s projection power is currently limited to the South Pacific region with little ability to move necessary decisive force beyond that region without allied logistical support, especially to the potential ‘hotspots’ of conflict.<sup>180</sup> Whilst China’s strategic priorities may be beginning to stretch further out from the Middle Kingdom, its most crucial priorities still lie within Asia.

In the Ministry of Defence’s *NZDF Capability Reviews: Phase One – Land Forces and Sealift* report of 2000, the stated NZDF policy objectives in the Asia-Pacific region are as follows:

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[claim/tabid/1607/articleID/250577/Default.aspx](http://www.mde.govt.nz/claim/tabid/1607/articleID/250577/Default.aspx)

<sup>179</sup> Ministry of Defence, *Defence Capability Plan*, (Wellington: Ministry of Defence, 2011): 10

<sup>180</sup> Robert Ayson, ‘New Zealand, Australia and the Asia-Pacific Strategic Balance: from Trade Agreements to Defence White Papers,’ *New Zealand International Review* 36:1 (January/February 2011): 8.

“Continue to participate in FPDA activities; build upon existing co-operative bilateral defence relations with Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines; develop a broader-based defence dialogue with other nations in East Asia...In East Asia, New Zealand's security policy will include active participation in important regional fora such as APEC and the ASEAN Regional Forum; a constructive approach to regional human rights initiatives; and, where necessary and feasible, mediation and PSOs.”<sup>181</sup>

The primary focus of the NZDF in the region is therefore Southeast Asia and building upon ties with FPDA countries. It does, however, mention NZDF engagement in East Asia but through ‘regional fora’ as well as ‘PSO’s, or peace support operations, where ‘feasible and necessary’.

Christopher Dandeker and James Gow explain that PSOs reflect what may be considered ‘second-generation’ peacekeeping, a change which occurred in the 1990’s.<sup>182</sup> There is much debate about the nature and implications of what PSOs are, but Dandeker and Gow argue that “there is wide agreement that, in recent years, military operations in support of peace increased in number, size, scope and complexity.”<sup>183</sup>

This implies that PSOs, which reflect this upscale in capability requirements, are a lot more demanding on resources than ‘traditional’ peacekeeping operations. So what kind of scenarios in East Asia was the Ministry of Defence considering when it explored the possibility of employing the NZDF for ‘necessary and feasible’ operations in East Asia, given the extra resources required?

Perhaps the way the Ministry views the relationship between NZDF capabilities and the Asia-Pacific theatre has changed. The Ministry’s *Statement of Intent* for 2012-2015 lists a number of government priorities, one of which is to ‘maintain and build on’ strategic relations with countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The Ministry explains the means it will contribute to this priority:

“We will support the Five Power Defence Arrangements and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus. We will continue to build our defence relationship with the United States.”<sup>184</sup>

To begin with, it is important to note that any threats to New Zealand, either direct or indirect, are highly unlikely to be experienced by New Zealand alone, and that any given threats in the region are

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<sup>181</sup> Ministry of Defence, *New Zealand Defence Force Capability Reviews: Phase One – Land Forces and Sealift* (Wellington: Ministry of Defence, November 2000): 29.

<sup>182</sup> Christopher Dandeker and James Gow, ‘The Future of Peace Support Operations: Strategic Peacekeeping and Success’, *Armed Forces and Society* 23:3 (Spring 1997): 327-329.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>184</sup> Ministry of Defence, *Statement of Intent 1 July 2012-30 June 2015* (Wellington: Ministry of Defence, 2012): 11.

likely to be faced in concurrence with the capabilities of traditional partners.<sup>185</sup> This can be extended from the strategic to the tactical front –the possibilities of the NZDF being deployed by itself on any sort of mission.

*Foundations of New Zealand Military Doctrine* specifically states the NZDF will become a Network Force, meaning that “there are likely to be few if any missions or tasks that the NZDF of the future will undertake where it will not be working at some level with other partners.”<sup>186</sup> For example, even before the completion of Project Protector, the Royal New Zealand Navy deployed a frigate and support vessel throughout the Asian-Pacific region with ease in 2005 and 2006, but only within the context of joint exercises of representational visits.<sup>187</sup>

A fairly high chance that the NZDF will be deployed in a theatre in cooperation with another partner significantly raises the bar on NZDF capabilities, and bodes well for increased military cooperation with China. Just because the NZDF may have limited or no ability to deploy by itself anywhere in East Asia, defence relations with China may increase the tactical value of the NZDF. This has already been seen with regards to what New Zealand can contribute to PKOs. These, however, are only tentative possibilities. Expanding the capabilities of the NZDF is one thing, but for the moment Wellington is merely relishing the opportunity to talk with the PLA at a very senior level and opening the door for discussion. Any further development of this possibility, however, is interesting to speculate about.

While capabilities will undoubtedly be bolstered by defence partners regardless of the theatre of operations, New Zealand cannot base its strategic outlook entirely on the guarantee of military cooperation in the future. To this end the nation’s own capabilities must certainly be a defining factor, or at least taken into account in determining how New Zealand and China interact in the future. At present, New Zealand’s capabilities in a scenario where the NZDF operates independently, however unlikely that may scenario may be, are limited to the South Pacific region, something which must be considered before New Zealand strengthens this relationship.

This all of course precludes Chinese defence engagement in the South Pacific region. While New Zealand and Australia still play a dominant role in the region, China is increasing its cooperation with countries in the region. China has strong defence relationships with many South Pacific states. In

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<sup>185</sup> Lt. Commander C.J. Gordon, RNZN, ‘Future of Asia-Pacific Security: Implications for replacing the RNZN’s ANZAC Class Frigates,’ (Commandant’s Papers, Massey University, 2007): 38.

<sup>186</sup> New Zealand Defence Force, *Foundations of New Zealand Military Doctrine – NZDDP-D 2004* (New Zealand Defence Force: Wellington, 2004), 10-9.

<sup>187</sup> Jim Rolfe, *Cutting Their Cloth: New Zealand’s Defence Strategy* (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2007), 17.



2010 East Timor and China signed a contract for China to build a US\$9 million complex in Dili for East Timor's defense headquarters. By this stage China had already paid for the president's palace, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building and the military residential headquarters.<sup>188</sup> China is one of the main financial supporters of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), the chief intergovernmental body of the five Melanesian countries: Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu and the Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS) – the Melanesian pro-independence movement in New Caledonia.<sup>189</sup> In December 2011 the Samoan Government accepted a RMB10 million grant from China for 'economic and technical assistance'.<sup>190</sup>

China is indicating its increased interest in the region, on diplomatic, economic and defence fronts. This does not, however, translate into a New Zealand exclusion from the region. There is nothing to indicate that the NZDF and PLA would not be able to cooperate in the region in a range of contingencies, particularly in the areas of disaster relief, humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping. New Zealand's role in the South Pacific, especially its rather dominant role in the Polynesian region, may in fact work to New Zealand's advantage.

Beth Greener, for example, discusses the general debate about New Zealand and Australia's role in the South Pacific, and how the academic community in either country is divided about how to perceive China's increased influence in the region. Some view China's role in this region as increasingly 'destabilising', while others consider it an advantage – by working together with China, Australia and New Zealand could improve their abilities to develop the region.<sup>191</sup>

Another factor here is how the NZDF's maritime capabilities fit into China's plans for the region. The Asia-Pacific region is, after all, a maritime region, and each country in the region is acutely aware that the sea plays a dominant role in its own strategy. The rapidly changing dynamics of maritime power in the Asia-Pacific region also relate to how New Zealand sees its defence force, and particularly its maritime component, fitting into the evolving strategic picture.

China is concerned about its lack of control over the sea. Michael Wesley explains the awkward strategic situation which China may find itself in 20 years' time when "more than 60% of China's oil

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<sup>188</sup> Sara Everingham, 'China, East Timor strengthen military ties', ABC News website, August 24, 2010. Available at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2010-08-24/china-east-timor-strengthen-military-ties/956650>

<sup>189</sup> Ronald May, 'The Melanesian Spearhead Group – testing Pacific Island solidarity', *Policy Analysis: The Australian Strategic Policy Institute* 74 (8<sup>th</sup> February, 2011): 1-7.

<sup>190</sup> 'China and Samoa sign \$3.835 (10 million RMB) grant', *Savali*, December 3, 2011. Available at <http://www.savalinews.com/2011/12/03/china-and-samoa-sign-3-83510-million-rmb-grant/>

<sup>191</sup> A range of scholars referenced in Beth Greener, 'Australia, New Zealand and East Asian Regional Cooperation', Draft Paper for Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, September 10, 2009: 8.

will arrive courtesy of sea lanes guarded by the US Navy”, given China’s increasing dependence on oil imports to match its increase in growth and the massively expanded energy needs of its developing population.<sup>192</sup> Rather than willingly submit itself to a grim scenario in which the US is able to squeeze and blackmail China at every turn, China has naturally begun to approach the problem by seeking to challenge US naval dominance in its immediate maritime area of influence.

This had led China down the road of ‘sea denial’, preventing the US from total ‘sea control’ in the Pacific region. If not only China, but other countries in the region, head down this strategic road, this may lead to an environment in which no state has dominance over Asia’s waters, but rather several states have “mutual sea denial capabilities.”<sup>193</sup>

Where does New Zealand’s current or projected maritime capability fit into this picture? How does a strengthening military relationship with China marry into a future maritime strategic environment characterised by tension as the US loses its naval dominance, or, more pertinently, one in which “mutual sea denial capabilities” cast a negative outlook on strategic stability in the region? This is an important and highly complex variable in the New Zealand-China equation. The PLA probably does not look at the New Zealand Navy in terms of capabilities. But returning to the idea of New Zealand as an intermediary in the region, dialogue and exchange between the RNZN and the PLA’s naval forces provide an interesting focal point for both Wellington and Beijing to discuss how developments in the Asia-Pacific maritime environment will work for both sides in the future. Wellington may be presented with the opportunity to gauge Chinese motives in the region, particularly contentious areas such as the South China Sea, furthering its understanding of developments as they occur and enhancing its strategic options. Beijing, in turn, may be able to use naval cooperation with New Zealand to build comprehension about Western intentions in the region. New Zealand’s relationship with Australia and the US provide it with the ability to communicate these ideas to China. Once again this remains a highly tenuous area which comes with a whole set of possibilities and limitations.

The limitations of the New Zealand’s defence relationship with China from New Zealand’s point of view may come from the NZDF capability range, existing defence policy and New Zealand’s current defence relationships with traditional partners. There are also a number of potential catalysts for Sino-New Zealand ties, particularly if New Zealand is able to increase its strategic value in Beijing by

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<sup>192</sup>Speech by Dr Michael Wesley to the Victoria University public symposium, “New Zealand, Australia and China’s Rise,” April 7, 2011. Available at [www.asianz.org.nz](http://www.asianz.org.nz).

<sup>193</sup> Hugh White, ‘China shifts Pacific waters with its aircraft carrier trials,’ *The Age*, August 30, 2011. Available at <http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/politics/china-shifts-pacific-waters-with-its-aircraft-carrier-trials-20110829-1jib4.html>

offering niche operational expertise in areas such as peacekeeping and disaster relief, or if Wellington were to take on the role of go-between for China and the rest of the West.

But where does this leave New Zealand? Is a stronger defence relationship with China strategically feasible?

Hugh White sets out five fairly defined strategic options for New Zealand in a future which differs from that of the status quo – that is, of a “stable Asian order supported by uncontested US primacy”. These are as follows: strengthen military ties with the United States, seek a security guarantee with another great power, seek armed neutrality, seek closer ties with Australia in a policy of joint, armed neutrality or “together, alone”, and finally, a position of unarmed neutrality in which New Zealand would “hope for the best”.<sup>194</sup>

The second category is of the most significance to a discussion of New Zealand and China’s military relations. There is no guarantee that stronger military ties with the US necessarily dictate how New Zealand forms its defence relationship with China. As for the other options, armed neutrality either alone or with Australia completely negates any discussion of a military relationship with China. Unarmed neutrality also eliminates the possibility of any sort of defence relationship with China.

In terms of the second option, White mentions Japan and India as potential candidates for ‘great power alliance’, but fails to mention China, yet when describing Australia’s options in a similar mould, presents only the possibility of a new ‘great and powerful friend’.<sup>195</sup> Interestingly enough, India is discussed in New Zealand’s 2010 White Paper as a growing power with which New Zealand will continue to increase its bilateral relations with.<sup>196</sup>

When it comes to New Zealand, White dismisses the option of cementing defence ties with a non-US great power in the region as being as costly and risky as that of pursuing a stronger military relationship with the US, which likewise would entail meeting the political and military demands contingent of any security arrangement with any greater power.<sup>197</sup> When discussing the possibility of Australia seeking a more powerful ally other than America, White immediately explains that this option would be “very hard to manage.”<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Hugh White, ‘New Zealand’s Strategic Options in the Asian Century: An Australian View,’ *Security Challenges* 7:1 (Autumn 2011): 53.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>196</sup> New Zealand Ministry of Defence, *Defence White Paper 2010*: 31.

<sup>197</sup> Hugh White, ‘New Zealand’s Strategic Options in the Asian Century: An Australian View’ in *Security Challenges* 7:1 (Autumn 2011): 54.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 52

This difficulty which New Zealand faces in strategic direction, where there are a range of options available all of which have severe disadvantages, would be exacerbated by increased Sino-US strategic competition in the region. Yet if tension between China and the United States were to mount, so too would the strategic importance of New Zealand to China – the two variables are positively correlated. This puts New Zealand in an interesting strategic position. As US-China tensions rise, so too does New Zealand's strategic value to either country. As New Zealand's strategic value goes up, so does her bargaining price – she would be able to secure a lot more from a security guarantee with China in a strategically tense Asia-Pacific environment.

While important to take heed of the differences which separate the twenty-first century global strategic environment from those of the past, it would be foolhardy to pass by those traditional adages of strategy which scholars and generals alike have taken to heart. For example, Jakobson expresses in his own words one of those concepts which has been passed down through the ages: “the greater the conflict between the great powers; the greater the strategic importance of the small neighbour to its great power neighbour; the greater the strategic importance of the small neighbour to the neighbour's great power enemy.”<sup>199</sup>

This lesson holds true throughout history. So in the way the Iberian hinterland and small offshore Mediterranean islands became key strategic outposts during the struggle between Rome and Carthage for control of the Mediterranean, so too did small Caribbean islands take centre-stage as bloody battlegrounds as Spain, England, France and Holland vied for control of the New World trade during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While Sweden, Russia and Denmark competed furiously for control of tiny outposts in the Baltic Sea during the course of a run of bloody conflicts, Britain and Germany scrapped over small desolate islets in the Atlantic Ocean, the Baltic Sea and the English Channel.

This scenario of increased tension has certain ramifications for New Zealand. For example, in a situation whereby the Asia-Pacific region was subjected to increasing and irreversible bilateral tension between the United States and China, and other powers in the region such as Japan, Indonesia and Australia were to gravitate towards one camp or the other, New Zealand may be required to decide on whether to ‘make or break’ its defence ties with China.

As Ayson explains, in a scenario of rising tensions between China and the United States, the US

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<sup>199</sup> M. Jakobson, *The Diplomacy of the Winter War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1961) as quoted in Olav F. Knudsen, ‘Of Lambs and Lions: Relations Between Great Powers and their Smaller Neighbours,’ *Cooperation and Conflict* 23:111 (1988): 115.

would at some point require Australia to make a decision about whether it will maintain its commitments to its formal security alliance with the US, or respect the interests of its ever-important economic partner, China. New Zealand, on the other hand, is not formally committed in the same way.<sup>200</sup> This advantage, however, may be disappearing. New Zealand and the United States have made some bold moves towards each other in the last two years or so, especially under a National government which is encouraging this development.

This scenario brings to mind those core concepts of traditional international relations theory: balancing and bandwagoning. In a scenario of rising geostrategic tension between the US and China in the Asia-Pacific region, how would New Zealand treat its relationship with China? In *The Origins of Alliances* Walt dismisses the concept of balance of power and replaces it with the idea of 'balance of threat', which explains that "when there is an imbalance of threat (i.e., when one state or coalition appears especially dangerous), states will form alliances or increase their internal efforts in order to reduce their vulnerability."<sup>201</sup> In this scenario it may be possible to calculate New Zealand's future security relationship with China. Walt defines the 'imbalance of threat' occurring when the most threatening state is significantly more dangerous than the second most threatening state.<sup>202</sup> In this case, the threat posed by China towards New Zealand must be outweighed by a greater threat in order for New Zealand to bandwagon with China:

Total threat posed by China > Second greatest perceived threat = New Zealand balances against China

Total threat posed by China < Second greatest perceived threat = New Zealand bandwagons with China

This focus on increased Sino-US tension in the Asia-Pacific region is one which the 2010 *Defence Assessment* mentions, and one which comes with many potential limitations and possibilities for the Sino-New Zealand defence relationship. But this is only one of many potential scenarios in the Asia-Pacific region in the immediate future. All other regional strategic scenarios do not preclude stronger Chinese-New Zealand military relations – some even encourage a strengthening of ties on this front.

R.L. Rothstein describes three historical types of international system, only the last of which pertains to increased Sino-US tension: the "conservative" system, typically described as the 'balance of

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<sup>200</sup> Robert Ayson, 'Rise of Chinese Dragon could divide Australia and New Zealand,' *New Zealand Herald*, April 20, 2011.

<sup>201</sup> Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987): 263.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

power' system exemplified by the nineteenth century Concert of Europe during which borders were fixed; a more contentious and dynamic multipolar system, the type of which unravelled the aforementioned Concert; and a bipolar system such as that of the Cold War.<sup>203</sup>

Hedley Bull in turn describes a range of possible future global power systems,<sup>204</sup> very few of which have the same implications as this notion of a bipolar Pacific. Hardly any of these scenarios would limit stronger defence ties between New Zealand and China.

Another example is the increasingly popular 'neo-medieval' model is described by Jim Rolfe as a scenario where "current systems of interstate relationships are lost under different forms of overlapping supranational, transnational, national and subnational processes and institutions. Loyalties may be given to more than one ordering system (as in the competition between church and king in the middle ages) and the systems will compete for that loyalty."<sup>205</sup>

This last model poses difficulties for the Chinese-New Zealand military relationship, as it would lose relevance while the state system is supplanted by the pulls of other transnational systems, and security were no longer the sole responsibility of states – the strengthening or weakening of Chinese-New Zealand military relations would lose importance as the range of systems competed within all areas of global responsibility. This redundancy of the relationship of course applies to all non-state future scenarios.

Another scenario, of course, is the status quo. A scenario where the status quo is somehow maintained for the immediate future lowers New Zealand's strategic value to players such as China and the US. As it is, in the current Asia-Pacific scenario in which there is fairly low-level tension (with mild exceptions in the Korean peninsula and the South China Sea) "Asian tears would not be shed if New Zealand fell off the map."<sup>206</sup> In this way, New Zealand must put in more effort to reap the benefits of engaging with other powers in the region. New Zealand's security relationship with China being no exception to this rule, "New Zealand must be initiator more than respondent, but this requires a greater lifting of sights from the internal to the external adjustment."<sup>207</sup>

What further excuses New Zealand's strategic predicament from established power relations theories is the influence of global post-Cold War dynamics on the topic. Also taken into account is that both

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<sup>203</sup> Robert L. Rothstein, *Alliances and Small Powers* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1968).

<sup>204</sup> Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 2008): 225-247.

<sup>205</sup> Jim Rolfe, *New Zealand's Security: Alliances and Other Military Relationships*, Working Paper 10/97, 17.

<sup>206</sup> Lindsay Watt, *New Zealand and China Towards 2000* (Wellington: Institute of Policy Studies, 1992): iv.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, iv.

Rothstein and his detractors were writing within the context of a Cold War environment. A post-Cold War environment is not so unique that it renders redundant the lessons of international power politics as espoused by Cold War academics. However, the post-Cold War era does introduce some new variables into the equation of how smaller powers can or ought to go about in directing military relations with much larger powers.

Here also there is the possibility for the development of what Ayson calls 'multialignment' with a range of powers who may or may not have shared interests.<sup>208</sup> Concepts like these find more relevance in a multipolarising world – hopefully without falling into what Keohane describes in 'Lilliputians' Dilemmas' as the "nonalignment trap", which he describes as the tendency by the academic community to avoid studying the intricacies of small power foreign policies and instead conveniently slotting into the 'non-aligned' category those small states who have not made an overt military commitment to any one larger power.<sup>209</sup>

Jim Rolfe plays on the idea of multialignment to discuss New Zealand's strategic relationship with the larger Asia-Pacific community:

"In the post-Cold War world, traditional security alliances may be irrelevant. However, military relationships leading to networking and confidence building, and the exchange of information and expertise continue to be important. It is in New Zealand's interests to maintain and build its military relationships with as many states in the Asia-Pacific region as possible."<sup>210</sup>

Rolfe discusses the formation of a 'security community', "within which other non-security international processes, such as wider political dialogue, trade or cultural exchanges, may freely take place and within which there is not and cannot be any thought of using armed force."<sup>211</sup> Whilst Rolfe is discussing the concept of a 'security community' within the context of pre-existing alliances, it is a description which appears to fit the mould of the concept of defence diplomacy. In this sense, China and New Zealand are perhaps developing the beginnings of a sort of informal security agreement to ensure that 'non-security processes' can occur within an environment in which there is no discussion of the use of armed force.

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<sup>208</sup> Robert Ayson, 'New Zealand, Australia and the Asia-Pacific Strategic Balance: from Trade Agreements to Defence White Papers,' *New Zealand International Review* 36:1 (January/February 2011): 8.

<sup>209</sup> Robert O. Keohane, 'Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics' in *Small States in International Relations*, eds. Christine Ingebritsen, Iver Neumann, Sieglinde Gstöhl and Jessica Beyer (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006): 55.

<sup>210</sup> Jim Rolfe, *New Zealand's Security*: 1.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

The idea of multialignment seems to be coming into play. US-New Zealand defence relations have strengthened substantially during the last 10 years, confirmed by the document signed between the two countries in 2012. Yet at the same time, it seems as though Beijing and Wellington have been upping the defence ante almost simultaneously as Wellington and Washington have been galvanising their ties. Wellington seems to be strengthening its ties with both countries, apparently not yet to the chagrin of neither major power. This sort of scenario, one which is only one of many but at the same time appears to be gaining ground, presents great potential for the Sino-New Zealand defence relationship.

The way New Zealand views China presents itself with a range of limits and possibilities for the defence relationship. On the one hand, New Zealand defence policy seems to be cautious at best and dither at worst when it comes to explaining its defence relationship with China. There is no indication yet that New Zealand political stances or public opinions are against a stronger relationship, but there are few indications there is a driver for stronger ties coming from this sector either. How limited NZDF capabilities fit into a deeper defence relationship are also questionable, unless of course viewed within the context of increased Chinese engagement in the South Pacific region. Finally, depending on future scenarios for the Asia-Pacific region, the Sino-New Zealand defence relationship is subject to a range of outcomes. A scenario in which nations aim to secure defence ties with one another in a process of 'multialignment' raises the most possibilities for the relationship – it also looks as if this process is already underway in the region.



## Theme Five – Concepts

Given this range of limitations and possibilities, it is perhaps best to try and find a concept which sums up the Sino-New Zealand defence relationship. Briefly looking at a few of these concepts should help to define the New Zealand-Chinese defence relationship along with its constraints and potential.

David Capie and Paul Evans outline a number of key concepts in *The Asia-Pacific Security Lexicon*. While most of the concepts explored in this book have relevance to the discussion, several of them are particularly pertinent. The idea of a 'security community' is closely related to this discussion. "Common security" was used first in a contemporary sense in the 1982 Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues chaired by former Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme.<sup>212</sup> Common security is defined in this report as "underpinned by the assumption that security is best assured through cooperation rather than competitive power politics."<sup>213</sup>

New Zealand and China share an interest in common security and the concept regularly features in the defence conversation between the two countries. The New Zealand Defence Force Statement of Intent for 2011-14 states that continuing defence engagement with China is important to ensure economic and political stability in the region, which is in New Zealand's direct interests.<sup>214</sup> In this sense New Zealand is assuring its own security by establishing common security practices with China. The PLA's defence attaché to New Zealand, Senior Colonel Chen Wenrong, stated in his speech in Wellington last year that "China will maintain the strategic orientation of preserving common security, seeking common development, and achieving common benefit with countries in the Asia-Pacific region."<sup>215</sup> First and foremost, at the very least in official dialogue, the idea of 'common security' is one which defines the current defence engagement between China and New Zealand.

But there are some other concepts which can serve as an introduction or a foundation on which to build an analysis of this relationship. One of these is the idea of 'confidence-building'. Three concepts

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<sup>212</sup> David Capie and Paul Evans, *The Asia-Pacific Security Lexicon* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007): 59.

<sup>213</sup> Palme Commission, The Report of the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues under the Chairmanship of Olof Palme – *Common Security: A Blueprint for Survival* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982) as quoted in David Capie and Paul Evans, eds., *The Asia-Pacific Security Lexicon* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007): 59.

<sup>214</sup> New Zealand Defence Force, *New Zealand Defence Force Statement of Intent 2011-2014* (Wellington: New Zealand Defence Force, 2011):13.

<sup>215</sup> Senior Colonel Chen Wenrong, Speech at the reception to celebrate the 84<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the China's People's Liberation Army, August 2, 2011, Wellington. Available at <http://www.chinaembassy.org.nz/eng/sgfb/t844776.htm>

outlined in Capie and Forster's *Lexicon* which are directly linked to one another are "confidence-building measures" (CBMs), "confidence- and security- building measures" (CSBMs) and "trust-building measures" (TBMs).<sup>216</sup> CBMs originated in the 1970's in Cold War Europe to describe revealing information about military manoeuvres between potential adversaries in order to avoid errors on both sides,<sup>217</sup> while CBSMs, which also originated in Cold War Europe, describe a more general concept which extends beyond military manoeuvres.<sup>218</sup> The Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific defines CSBMs as:

"Both formal and informal measures, whether unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral, that address, prevent, or resolve uncertainties among states, including both military and political elements. Such measures contribute to a reduction of uncertainty, misperception, and suspicion and thus help to reduce the possibility of incidental or accidental war. Measures focused primarily on economics, such as the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) dialogue, are not included, despite the realization that security broadly defined has an economic dimension and that economic mechanisms carry with them some confidence building and security implications."

The most recent Chinese White Paper of 2010 sums up 'confidence-building' as follows;

"Military confidence-building is an effective way to maintain national security and development, and safeguard regional peace and stability. With political mutual trust as the groundwork and common security as the goal, China is promoting the establishment of equal, mutually beneficial and effective mechanisms for military confidence-building, which should be based on the principles of holding consultations on an equal footing, mutual respect for core interests and recognition of major security concerns, not targeting at any third country, and not threatening or harming other countries' security and stability."<sup>219</sup>

The concept is directly related to the discussion at hand – China's defence relationship with New Zealand is mentioned later on in this same section of the document.

'Confidence-building' as part of the bilateral engagement is clearly a central theme of this relationship. New Zealand's defence policy documents, unfortunately, have very little to say on the

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<sup>216</sup> David Capie and Paul Evans, *The Asia-Pacific Security Lexicon 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007)

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-88.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-95.

<sup>219</sup> Chinese Government Official Online Publication, 'China's National Defence in 2010', March 31, 2011. Available at [http://english.gov.cn/official/2011-03/31/content\\_1835499\\_11.htm](http://english.gov.cn/official/2011-03/31/content_1835499_11.htm)

matter. As already stated there is no mention of China's military relationship with New Zealand in the 2010 White Paper. There is, however, a reference to the concept of common security in the White Paper in reference to China, Japan, Korea and the US:

“Our interests are best served by a region in which all countries and especially the major powers agree on the importance of stability and prosperity, and share a common understanding of how these goals should be secured.”<sup>220</sup>

None of the preceding documents to the White Paper, such as the Defence Assessment of 2010, make any reference to these concepts with regards to China. There are no mentions of this relationship in any of the Defence Review submissions. Apart from a very limited assortment of media soundbytes from military exchanges between the NZDF and the PLA, there is no indication of what New Zealand feels about this relationship.

And while the Chinese White Paper does not go into depth about its relationship with New Zealand, it discusses the nature of its military relationships with other countries and employs a range of vocabulary to do so. ‘Confidence-building’ is already mentioned as a concept. But the Chinese White Paper goes a step further. It suggests that its policy is not specifically geared towards CBMs, but more towards the broader concept of CSBMs: promoting mechanisms for “military confidence-building” (covered by the CBMs concept) but also “mutual respect for core interests and recognition of major security concerns.”

The document then moves on to mentioning “political mutual trust.” In the most literal sense, the White Paper does not use it in direct reference to New Zealand. But it is directly and openly implied – the discussion about China's defence relationships with a list of countries, and what status each relationship is at, immediately follows on from this.

What is more, talks of ‘trust’ do feature in the New Zealand-China defence dialogue. The fourth-ranking member of the Politburo, Jia Qinglin, recently described the need for China and New Zealand to increase ‘political trust’ with one another.<sup>221</sup> ‘Trust’ implies something more concrete than ‘confidence’. So where do CBMs and CSBMs fit in here?

This is where Capie and Evans evolve the concept of CBMS even further by discussing the fairly new concept of “trust-building” mechanisms. TBMs are related to CBMs and CSBMs but have a different

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<sup>220</sup> New Zealand Ministry of Defence, *Defence White Paper 2010*:19.

<sup>221</sup> Xinhua, ‘China's top political advisor makes 4-point proposal to boost ties with New Zealand’, website of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in New Zealand. Available at <http://www.chinaembassy.org.nz/eng/zt/jql/t924968.htm>

hue to them. According to Capie and Evans, some scholars think of TBMs as more focussed on a gradual approach to confidence-building, while others think of them as more flexible and informal than CBMs and CSBMs.<sup>222</sup> Chinese participants at the Second Canada-China Seminar (CANCHIS II) in 1997 described, from Chinese deductions of the two terms, that ‘confidence’ is the procedure towards obtaining ‘trust’, which is more conclusive and backed up by action.<sup>223</sup>

Before moving on it is important to include the idea of ‘defence diplomacy’ in the way the China-New Zealand defence relationship is analysed. Andrew Cottey and Anthony Forster define ‘defence diplomacy’ as “the peacetime cooperative use of armed forces and related infrastructure...as a tool of foreign and security policy,” distinguishing this form of military cooperation from the more traditional *realpolitik* form of military cooperation for the purposes of strengthening a state and expanding its sphere of influence against possible contenders within the framework of a traditional ‘balance of power’.<sup>224</sup>

In the same *Adelphi* issue defence diplomacy is defined as occurring for one or more of three reasons: as a means of strategic engagement between ‘former or potential enemies’, the aim of Western democracies to “promote democratic civilian control of the armed forces as part of wider efforts to support liberal democracy and good governance”, and as a means to develop one another’s PKO capacities and capabilities.<sup>225</sup>

Not all of these three reasons for defence diplomacy apply fully to New Zealand and China’s defence relationship. China and New Zealand have only once been proxy enemies – during combat alongside allies in the Korean peninsula in the 1950’s. Nor is it clear that New Zealand is using defence diplomacy as a means to spread liberal democracy and good governance in China. While these elements certainly do exist somewhere in the background, they make up only part of the picture.

The third point made by Cottey and Forster, however, has direct application – mutually enhancing one another’s PKO capabilities. While this element certainly does not completely define the NZ-China relationship, it is a factor which is of increasing importance. On the PKO front, this relationship certainly has the potential to be classified as a typical of modern defence diplomacy.

And regardless of whether Cottey’s and Forster’s three classifications of defence diplomacy are completely unassailable, the idea does fit in neatly with how New Zealand and China are engaging

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<sup>222</sup> David Capie and Paul Evans, *The Asia-Pacific Security Lexicon*: 245-247.

<sup>223</sup> Comments by Chinese participants at the Second Canada-China Seminar (CANCHIS II), Toronto, January 1988.

<sup>224</sup> Andrew Cottey and Anthony Forster, ‘Introduction’ in *The Adelphi Papers* 44:365 (2004):6.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*,5-14.

with each other. Are the PLA and the NZDF not 'tools' of 'foreign and security policy'? It is hard to think of the current military exchange is completely outside this definition. The idea of a state of defence diplomacy is also backed up briefly in one piece of New Zealand policy – 'defence diplomacy' as a concept is mentioned briefly in MFAT's *Our Future with Asia* paper in regards to New Zealand's military relations with a range of countries in Asia.<sup>226</sup>

How do these ideas further understanding about New Zealand and China's defence relationship? The relationship has elements of the following. There is a common security theme in the region, as both countries seek to work together to counter elements perceived to be harmful to their populations. These 'threats' are the concern of many states: international terrorism, economic uncertainty and the negative societal repercussions associated with this, climate change, political instability in the region, and transnational crime. The Sino-New Zealand relationship is also one of confidence-building, although leaning much less towards traditional, Cold War concepts of confidence-building and more towards contemporary ideas about confidence- and security-building and even trust-building. Finally, the defence engagement between the two countries is somewhat typical of twenty-first century defence diplomacy, particularly in the area of enhancing one another's peacekeeping capabilities.

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<sup>226</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Our Future with Asia*:58.

## Conclusion

When two Royal New Zealand Navy frigates visited Shanghai in July 1987, neither Beijing nor Wellington could have been aware that some twenty years later, both countries would be discussing security issues with one another at the highest levels of both government and the military. From 1995 onwards this dialogue increased dramatically, and now it is left for both countries to decide what they want to take out of this development.

Literature on the Sino-New Zealand relationship as a whole certainly exists, but its coverage is patchy at best with a particular focus on economic issues as a whole. There is a reason for this – this happens to be the strongest means of communication which currently exist between both countries. One facet of this relationship which has received negligible comment is how China and New Zealand talk at the defence level. This document attempts to amend that oversight by building a framework for this topic, with the bold purpose of being able to contribute something meaningful to an understanding of how this relationship works as a whole. By better comprehending what, how and why this defence dialogue operates by containing all aspects of it in one document will hopefully give those who analyse this relationship in the future a better idea of how the Sino-New Zealand machine works.

New Zealand and China's defence relations are characterised both by a range of limits and a whole suite of possibilities. This essay broke down the defence relationship into five themes, each of which is characterised by both constraints on further dialogue and potential opportunities for further engagement. The first theme was the history of New Zealand and Chinese relations in general, in which there has been a transition from a fear in New Zealand of the Chinese 'peril', to one in which New Zealanders are more open minded to how they talk with the Chinese. But throughout New Zealand history there have been possibilities for further engagement, whether it be the New Zealand government being one of the only governments in the world to petition the League of Nations during the Japanese invasion of China, or more recently when New Zealand has led the West in engaging China as it reforms and adapts to the contemporary world. Overall the New Zealand-China relationship is one characterised by a trend of increasing possibilities.

The second theme investigated the exact state of Chinese-New Zealand defence relations as they sit today. While there appears to be a sudden and significant increase in high-level military exchange happening between the NZDF and the PLA, this does not appear to correlate with media coverage in New Zealand or with actual operational cooperation. The possibilities for engagement in this area come mostly from economic ties, in which there has been more of a 'genuine' sort of engagement

between both countries in terms of people-to-people contacts. It is perhaps from the stronger, more established platform of economic cooperation that defence dialogue can find its footing, and certainly the current administration in New Zealand has made a point of putting the economic discussion first.

Another theme which was explored, and one which is perhaps most contentiously divided between the opposing forces of limitations and possibilities, is how New Zealand fits into China's world picture. On the surface the Chinese military exchange with New Zealand is nothing unique. Chinese foreign policy evolved significantly during the 1990's, a time in which it began developing new ideas about security, moving away from the harsher, more hostile narrative of the Cold War into one in which it saw the security of its neighbours and other global powers as mutually beneficial to its own security. One of the methods by which Beijing began engaging other countries around the world was by way of high-level military exchange. China in fact began official military discussions with both Australia and the United States more than a decade before it formalised the process with New Zealand. Furthermore, this new security outlook and the means by which it is achieved are accompanied by increased Chinese engagement in global multilateral initiatives, buttressed by helpful accommodating precepts in the established, historical Chinese world view. Although the relationship is part of a much greater picture, this does not limit it, in that China may have a direct interest in strengthening its defence relationship with New Zealand as part of its new and developing grand strategy.

But even these ideas do not completely explain how China engages New Zealand in defence. New Zealand for one poses itself as a potential mouthpiece for China to speak to the West. New Zealand played no part in humiliating the Chinese during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and Wellington's traditional views on multilateralism and a stable world order currently match Beijing's priorities neatly. China can engage New Zealand as a sort of experiment, to try out diplomatic instruments on a Western country with minimum risk. It also provides Beijing with an understanding of how the West works, without having to lose face. Furthermore, New Zealand may be able to offer China expertise in one of its most experienced areas of defence – peacekeeping. Although this concept has been discussed in public dialogue, a true exchange of this product has not occurred. Nonetheless, it remains an interesting reminder of how China's engagement with New Zealand is perhaps something a little more than typical.

The fourth theme was a natural inversion of the third – how China fits into New Zealand's greater world view. There does not seem to be any overwhelming consensus in New Zealand nowadays that

China poses any sort of threat to New Zealand, which opens up new possibilities for engagement. The New Zealand policy record, however, is a different story. New Zealand's Defence White Paper of 2010 distinguished itself as making out Chinese ascendancy in the region to be a 'natural' process. Other references in the same document, as well as evidence from preceding documents, indicate that perhaps this statement was the exception rather than the rule. The NZDF additionally fails to make out in its own policy about how it intends to engage China within its own capability set. This of course precludes the possibility of China increasing its focus on the South Pacific region, which does not necessarily posit a 'risk' to New Zealand's sphere of influence. Rather, cooperation between the two countries in the region posits continual possibilities for establishing stability in an increasingly unstable region. In terms of future scenarios, New Zealand need not concern itself entirely with increased China-US geopolitical tension in the region, because this may in fact increase New Zealand's strategic value to both Beijing and Washington. But this is definitely not the only road ahead, and an Asia-Pacific future which looks more 'multialigned' would in fact suit tighter Sino-New Zealand defence relations.

The final theme was a brief discussion of current concepts about defence dialogue in the twenty-first century, in an attempt to define this defence relationship and where it is going as succinctly as possible. A few of the ideas which sum up this exchange over the past years have been an increase in the common security of the Asia-Pacific region, as both countries seek to build confidence, security and trust with one another for the purposes of enhancing their own sense of how secure they feel.

This essay aimed to tentatively answer the following question: are Sino-New Zealand defence relations dominated by the force of limits, or more open to future possibilities?

The limitations for defence engagement between both countries seem to come from policymakers from either side who are not yet willing to commit to stronger defence ties. This is, after all, a new relationship. Yet the possibilities for further engagement are everywhere and are becoming more tangible in an increasingly intertwined world where states are struggling with an increasing plethora of non-state security threats. China has plenty to gain and little to lose from furthering its defence ties with New Zealand. New Zealand has plenty to consider, depending on how the Asia-Pacific strategic environment evolves in the immediate future. A new and more meaningful defence relationship with China is one which is seeded with a complexity of large opportunities and perhaps sizeable risks. New Zealand must also be careful that it is not stumbling into a great power game it doesn't know the rules for and has little experience in, before thinking about its true strategic



intentions now and in the future. Concrete decisions about New Zealand's direction need to be made at the top of its defence hierarchy.

One thing is certain: New Zealand cannot afford to factor China out of its strategic calculations. Perceived risks of further cooperation with China also arise from certain assumptions. Yet as history would dictate, perceived risks seldom come to fruition in the exact form they were formulated in. An evolving strategic partnership with China is occurring simultaneously with other defence partners, and there is no indication that this is becoming an inefficient method for New Zealand to engage the world. The exact opposite may in fact be true. After all, good strategy means creating as many options as possible, and China is not one option New Zealand can afford to eliminate in a new and increasingly Asian century.

## **Appendix**

1938 – Gung Ho Movement established by Rewi Alley in China.

December 22, 1972 – Official recognition of the PRC by Norman Kirk's Labour administration.

July 18-22, 1987 – Two RNZN frigates visit Shanghai.

May 1995 – General Xu Huizi, Deputy Chief of Staff of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA), talks with the MOD in an Auckland stopover.

1996 – Deputy Chief of Staff of PLA, Lt.-Gen. Xiong Guangkai responds to a New Zealand Government invitation to visit. This is the most senior military delegation of China to have ever visited Wellington. Secretary of Defence Gerald Hensley visits Beijing, the first senior New Zealand military figure to do so.

1997 – New Zealand is the first developed country to sign a bilateral agreement with China as part of its bid to enter the World Trade Organisation.

1998 – Both Chinese and New Zealand Defence Ministers visit the other's country, and there is a naval exchange between RNZN and PLA Naval forces.

2003 – President Hu Jintao visits New Zealand and signals his intention to sign a free trade agreement with New Zealand.

2004 – New Zealand acknowledges China's market economy status.

October 2007 – a Chinese naval warship formation visited Wellington and Auckland and participated in the first joint China-New Zealand-Australia joint maritime exercise.

2008 – New Zealand and China sign a Free Trade Agreement after four years of negotiation.

March 2010 – Minister of Foreign Affairs Murray McCully visits China, during which he met Vice Premier Li Keqiang and held talks with Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi.

April 2010 – CPPCC Vice Chairman and Chairman of the China Foundation for Human Rights Development Huang Mengfu visits New Zealand.

May 17, 2010 – Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission General Guo Boxiong visits New Zealand. He also appears to be in the country in August that year.

June 2010 – Vice President Xi Jinping comes to NZ and meets up with Key, Satyanand, Lockwood and English.

June 2010 – PLA Deputy Chief of the General Staff General Ma Xiaotian holds the Third Round of China-New Zealand Military-to-Military Talks with Vice Chief of New Zealand Defense Force Rear Admiral Jack Steer in Beijing.

July 2010 – Prime Minister John Key visits Beijing, where he holds talks with Premier Wen Jiabao and met Vice President Xi Jinping.

July 2010 – Chinese premier Wen Jiabao visits New Zealand and meets with Prime Minister John Key.

August 30, 2010 – Vice Chairman of China's Central Military Commission Guo Boxiong meets with New Zealand Secretary of Defence John McKinnon, in Beijing. Guo says that relations are at an all-time high and that there is increased political trust between the two sides. Both sides looking forward to further cooperation for the sake of 'regional stability'.

September 2010 – Chinese Ambassador to New Zealand Xu Jianguo presented his credentials to Governor-General Anand Satyanand. General Li Jinai, member of the Central Military Commission and Director General of the PLA General Political Department, as well as a training fleet of the Chinese Navy visit New Zealand. It is the fourth visit by Chinese Navy ships since China and New Zealand established diplomatic relations in 1972. During the stay in New Zealand, visiting Chinese Navy soldiers will visit an old people's home and give a joint musical performance with a troupe from the Royal New Zealand Navy.

November 2010 – Hu Jintao and John Key meet on the sidelines at the APEC summit in Yokohama.

June 2011 – A 24 member delegation of PLA officers travel to New Zealand. New Zealand is represented by Rear Admiral Jack Steer.

September 2011 – Chen Bingde, Chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army of China meets with NZDF CDF Rhys Jones. The two countries share 'wide common interests', according to Jones. Emphasis is on PKO, humanitarian assistance, disaster reduction and fighting pirates as well as promoting military relations to a higher level. "China takes a consistently strategic and long-term view to developing its relationship with New Zealand, and regards New Zealand as a good partner and friend to carry out mutually-beneficial cooperation with in the Asia-Pacific region," Guo says.

October 2011 – General Li Jinai, director of the General Political Department of the People's Liberation Army meets New Zealand's Army Chief Major General Timothy James Keating.

October 21, 2011 – Zhang Qinsheng, Deputy Chief of Staff of the PLA, talks with visiting Chief of the Army Timothy Keating in Beijing.

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