

**Ben King speech
Annual NZIIP Conference:**

1545-1600, 22 August 2024, Grand Hall, Beehive

E nga mana, e nga reo, e nga hou e wha
Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa.

I'm honoured to be asked to join you here today.

Thank you to the NZIIP board for putting on this annual conference and for your work throughout the year to build understanding and connect people in this profession.

You have created a unique and much needed collaborative environment to discuss Aotearoa's security and intelligence matters.

To attendees here today, I want to thank you for the work you do to keep New Zealanders safe. Your role is a niche one that often goes under the radar, and your accomplishments cannot always be celebrated openly. Thank you for all that you do.

A bit about me

I have been in the role of Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet for just 20 weeks.

I am also the Prime Minister's National Security advisor.

If you don't know me, my background has been in foreign affairs and trade for the last 27 years.

I've served overseas in the capitals of two of our five eyes partners – Canberra and Washington DC. I've also served in Saudi

Arabia and I had the privilege of being New Zealand's Ambassador to Thailand, with accreditations to Cambodia and Lao PDR.

I was appointed to MFAT's leadership team in 2017 with responsibility for Asia and the Americas; and then in 2020 I was appointed as the DCE with oversight of the policy programme.

In that capacity I was responsible for MFAT's relationship with the National Security System and the Intelligence Community.

So I have a really good sense of the work you do, and its importance to our mission to enhance New Zealand's safety and prosperity.

I understand the value of your work to inform assessment and policy.

And I am pleased to report that, over time, I've really seen the quality, utility and timeliness of your product improve. Of course tactics and methods will be a big driver of these improvements – but I know the performance uplift it's also due to the Community's relentless focus on customer needs.

What I've seen from this Government

I'd thought I'd start by sharing some of my insights about the current Government from the time I've been in this job.

I have found this Prime Minister to be crystal clear about his aspirations for New Zealand, and commitment to improving our performance internationally. He wants and expects results.

On the international front, the Prime Minister is determined to lift New Zealand's engagement. He's doing this through a deliberate strategy to "reset" New Zealand's foreign policy whilst maintaining our independence.

Key pieces of that reset are:

- Doubling down on our alliance relationship with Australia. It is our bedrock partner across the full range of national interests.
- Sustaining our commitment in the Pacific. The Pacific is our home, but it is also a theatre of great power competition. The Pacific's security is our security. Greater intelligence diplomacy is part of our response.
- A much greater focus on the Indo-Pacific, including direct contributions to peace and security initiatives.
- Within that Indo-Pacific focus, a particular emphasis on SEA and India.
- Defending Multilateralism and the Rules based order.
- Strengthening our Five Eyes relationships.

You will have seen the reset in action through the increased tempo of engagement by the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, and others.

This also shows by the places they are visiting. Europe and other parts of the world will always remain important, but our discretionary

effort is being prioritised in the regions where our greatest risk and opportunity lie - in the Pacific and the Indo-Pacific.

Regarding the Prime Minister more broadly, he likes to move at pace. He thinks fast, and he relishes engagement and dynamism.

He wants to understand how the government can make progress, what the risks and opportunities are, what the obstacles are and what would it take to really address them. He values high quality advice and information – including from our intelligence community.

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New Zealand's changing and challenging environment

Last year MFAT published an assessment on the global context New Zealand faces.

It highlighted some disturbing trends, such as a shift from international relations being governed less by rules and more by power.

For a country like ours, that is deeply troubling.

Or as MFAT put it, the global outlook is “grim”.

And to complicate matters further, other changes will likely exacerbate the challenges we face.

Climate change will impact our natural resources and lead to more severe weather events.

New technologies will create benefits but also presents new risks.

Social cohesion will continue to be strained by conflicts abroad, mistrust, and disengagement.

Our deteriorating national security environment poses complex and growing challenges to our safety and security:

- Terrorism remains a threat to New Zealanders at home and those travelling abroad.

- The NZSIS says that some states persistently engage in foreign interference against New Zealand, with the potential for significant harm.
- We feel the enduring effects from criminal and state-sponsored cyber attacks. Not to mention when patches simply don't go right!
- Space security is of increasing international concern, with implications for our own growing space industry.
- Geo-political tensions between the world's biggest players will affect New Zealand interests. Threats to New Zealand's national security are increasingly shaped by a combination of domestic and international elements.

How can we respond?

You won't be surprised that intelligence has a big role of play in the continued security of our nation and defence of our interests.

Our security and intelligence posture must continue to evolve, we need to be focused on what is most important, and then be smart about where we put our effort.

We need to focus on, and leverage off, our international relationships. These are of major importance to keeping New Zealanders safe, both in New Zealand and overseas.

The benefit to New Zealand from our collective and individual security relationships with our traditional like-minded partners makes a significant difference to our security and prosperity.

The intelligence and insights we gain allow us to provide more informed advice to Ministers, to better understand our strategic environment and the threats we face, and to substantively advance our national interests.

What we draw from these relationships contributes across all facets of our national security system.

We need to talk about the work we do and support a public conversation about national security.

We need to be candid not only about the threats we face and the deteriorating strategic context – but also about the value we get from our relationships and partnerships.

This empowers New Zealanders to protect themselves better, and underpins social license for the work of intelligence professionals.

We are strategy led

Of course, all of this is easier said than done.

To succeed in this challenging strategic environment we need to bring together all tools of the national security community - intelligence, defense, diplomacy, law enforcement, and more.

That is why New Zealand developed its first National Security Strategy last year. The Strategy gives clear direction and a new level of focus.

It is action-oriented, and designed to be flexible enough to adapt as priorities as these evolve.

The Strategy also describes the government's work in protecting New Zealanders through 12 core issues – those that have the greatest impact on our national security interests.

These are the issues that you might work on everyday – cyber security, disinformation, economic security, terrorism, foreign interference, and more.

There are three priorities in the strategy:

1. The first is **acting early** to protect our security. Intelligence will have a key role to play here by providing critical early insights.
2. The second priority is **working together**. This includes cooperation across New Zealand society as well as internationally. The Strategy is clear that our strong international partnerships are vital to being able to protect and promote our national security interests. As you heard earlier, this government wants to make the most of these partnerships.
3. The third priority is **leading an integrated approach** – bringing agencies and their tools together in new ways. This includes

integrating intelligence and policy advice, and a system-wide approach to developing our national security capabilities.

The National Security Board that I Chair is focused on how we turn the vision of the National Security Strategy into reality.

It is already changing how we work, but there is more to do. We cannot succeed without the ideas and expertise that intelligence professionals like you bring to the table.

Vision for the intelligence sector and how you can make a difference

How we react to national security threats and in crisis makes a difference.

As Chair of ODESC, responsible for our strategic crisis management arrangements, I've seen how the system responds and comes together when it needs to.

It is impressive.

There will always be the need to make quick decisions and we need intelligence to inform these.

We need agencies making the connections in our down time, whether that be internationally or domestically.

We need to be seeking out opportunities for collaboration.

This is even more so as we navigate these challenging times; our environment, our resources, cost constraints.

It is usual that in times of restraint, we put our heads down, singularly focus and just get on.

But this is the time, more than ever, when we need to reach out, keep our vision broad, and collaborate. Collaborating is not a discretionary activity – it's an essential condition for our success as a public service; and as a nation.

I ask each of you when you are going about your work to think of how you can involve others, to learn, to share, to teach, to improve.

In return, you can have confidence that the government wants to use the insight we gain from our intelligence professionals to take action. It values what you do, and it wants to do more than just admire the problems.

You'll see that in many ways, from public attributions of malicious cyber activity, through to new legislation addressing the national security issues that you work on.

Announce new award

I started with a thank you to attendees today and mentioned we don't celebrate success enough.

I'm pleased to announce that the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is sponsoring a new award for the NZIIP annual awards.

The award is for 'Outstanding Intelligence Collaboration'. It will be given to individuals or groups in the intelligence sector who have

demonstrated the highest dedication to inter-agency and/or all-of-government approaches, delivering integrated and efficient effects or results.

To finish

Intelligence is vital to our safety and security as the threats we face continue to evolve. This community of professionals has delivered for New Zealand. But just like the changing threats, we need you to continue to adapt and evolve. Remember to think about how you can collaborate in new and better ways to make a difference.

Thank you to everyone here today. Your work ultimately helps us to be better placed to support New Zealand's security and safety.

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa.

I'm now happy to answer any questions.

END