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The New Zealand Defence Force and Ukraine: military contributions to foreign and defence policy

Introduction

Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. In April, the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) deployed a C-130H Hercules aircraft and provided logistics personnel to assist with the transportation of military aid to support Ukraine's self-defence. This was followed by a deployment of Artillery Training Team experts in May, intelligence personnel in June, and infantry trainers in August. In May 2023, this training deployment was extended until 30 June 2024, and two additional NZDF staff were set to be deployed to conduct space training programmes for members of the Ukraine Armed Forces in Poland.¹

Why would a small country at the bottom of the world contribute to the defence of Ukraine? Underpinning these military contributions is a longstanding ideological commitment to a rules-based international order. But there are other interests at play here too. This paper unpacks the various foreign and defence policy values and interests at play that helped to generate the NZDF's engagement on the other side of the globe, noting the importance of domestic drivers as well as the relevance of small state status and a liberal like-mindedness to this endeavour.

¹ *Chris Hipkins announces new Ukraine support package*, Radio New Zealand, 03 May 2023 <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/489208/chris-hipkins-announces-new-ukraine-support-package/> [accessed: 31 May 2023].

Foreign and defence policy rationales for deployment

Since the outbreak of the conflict, New Zealand Army infantry personnel based in the UK have been the mainstay of the NZDF's response. These personnel have been delivering a five-week training course to Ukrainian personnel, which provides a basic introduction to soldiering, tactical exercises, range practices, and live field firing. In addition to covering offensive and defensive operations and legal matters, this introductory course also focuses on ensuring recruits understand fundamental skills in field craft, weapon handling, and marksmanship. Understanding different weapons systems, trench and urban warfare, and combat first aid are also components of this intensive short course.² In addition to this training role, the NZDF has also supported other operational needs via New Zealand-based open-source intelligence capability as well as the deploying of 14 NZDF intelligence analysts, 4 logistics specialists, 3 liaison officers, and 8 command and administration support personnel. Some surplus military equipment has also been donated, including body armour plates, helmets, and camouflage vests. Notably, too, financial support from the New Zealand government has been delivered in the form of a \$7.5 million donation for procuring weapons and ammunition, a \$4.1 million pledge to support commercial satellite access for Ukrainian Defence Intelligence, and \$10.6 million to the NATO Trust Fund and TAIT Communications for non-lethal military equipment.³

The provision of this sort of NZDF support to Ukraine is in keeping with New Zealand's foreign policy trajectory. There are three closely interrelated themes here which have significant historical presence: support for a rules-based international order, which is expected to be a liberal world order, and, as part of this, support for collective defence in the face of perceived unjust aggression.

Support for a rules-based international order

Support for international rules and multilateral diplomacy are key principles for small states in general: smaller states like New Zealand support collective institutions and arrangements both to amplify their voices and to tie down larger powers to ensure the security and prosperity of all states in the international community.⁴

² *NZ Army soldiers return from first Ukraine training mission in UK*, NZDF Media Centre, 12 December 2022, <https://www.nzdf.mil.nz/media-centre/news/nz-army-soldiers-return-from-first-ukraine-training-mission-in-uk/> [accessed: 14 February 2023].

³ *What we Do – Support to Ukraine*, New Zealand Ministry of Defence, December 2022, <https://www.defence.govt.nz/what-we-do/diplomacy-and-deployments/deployment-map/support-to-ukraine/> [accessed: 12 March 2023].

⁴ B. Thorhallsson, S. Steinsson, *Small State Foreign Policy*, [in:] *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Politics*, 24 May 2017, <https://oxfordre.com/politics/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-484> [accessed: 12 March 2023].

International law and international institutions are key in providing options for regulating relationships and establishing the rules of the game. Support for the UN and other international institutions has thus enjoyed strong bipartisan support across the political spectrum within New Zealand and New Zealand governments have a history of supporting other international politico-legal institutions such as the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice.⁵

A key component of contemporary international law is enshrined in the UN Charter. This is the privileging of state sovereignty and the right of states to self-defence, including collective self-defence, in the face of aggression (as per Article 51, in particular). It is notable, then, that the then Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, labelled Russia's first actions in February 2022 as a 'military offensive and an illegal invasion.'⁶ Ardern's first press release emphasised that the invasion was 'entirely avoidable', putting at risk 'an unthinkable number of innocent lives' in a 'disregard for diplomacy' and clear breaching of international law: 'As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, Russia has displayed a flagrant disregard for international law and abdicated their responsibility to uphold global peace and security. They now must face the consequences of those decisions.'⁷

Since these first days, the importance of a perceived breach of international law has continued to underpin the New Zealand's government's response to the situation. By May 2022, Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta again emphasised the opinion that 'Russia's actions are a flagrant attempt to undermine international law and the international system on which New Zealand relies. It has misused its veto in the Security Council, ignored the will of the United Nations General Assembly, and ignored the binding decision of the International Court of Justice ordering it to cease its invasion of Ukraine.'⁸

And, in underscoring the decision to extend and deepen New Zealand's engagement in supporting Ukraine at the end of 2022, the then Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern again emphasised that 'support from distant countries is deeply appreciated

⁵ B.K. Greener, *New Zealand in the World*, [in:] *Government and Politics in Aotearoa New Zealand*, eds. J. Hayward, L. Greaves, C. Timperley, 7th edn., Oxford University Press, [Melbourne] 2021.

⁶ J. Ardern, *Prime Minister's Statement on the Russian Invasion of Ukraine*, Beehive.govt.nz – The official website of the New Zealand Government, 25 February 2022, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/prime-ministers-statement-russian-invasion-ukraine> [accessed: 01 March 2022].

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ N. Mahuta cited in M. Hall, *New Zealand entering Ukraine conflict at 'whim of government' – former Labour General Secretary*, Radio New Zealand, 26 May 2022, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/world/491788/nz-entering-ukraine-conflict-at-whim-of-govt-former-labour-general-secretary> [accessed: 13 June 2022].

by Ukraine. Principles matter and Aotearoa New Zealand is committed to uphold the rules of international law and the United Nations Charter.⁹

The New Zealand government response to the Ukraine crisis rests on its understanding that there are specific international legal requirements that have been abrogated by Russia. Under contemporary international law, a country is only justified in using force for the purposes of self-defence. Russian authorities assert that Russia is responding to the rising threat of Ukrainian fascism, neo-Nazism, and threats to Russian-speaking populations within Ukrainian borders, but this version of events has not been accepted by the New Zealand government. Early statements clearly labelled Russia's actions as an 'unprovoked attack,' and this sentiment has predominated since.¹⁰

Moreover, as the conflict has unfolded, these *jus ad bellum* (ethics and law around the right to pursue war) concerns have been joined by *jus in bello* (ethics and law around the conduct of war) concerns. Both government and opposition commentators have asserted that Russia has engaged in actions that breach various Laws of Armed Conflict (LOAC). These are laid out in codes such as the Geneva Convention and in the definitions of war crimes as punishable in the International Criminal Court (ICC). By early April 2022, the New Zealand government agreed that there was evidence of war crimes being systematically perpetrated against Ukrainian civilians by Russian soldiers, and the Leader of the Opposition, National's Christopher Luxon, went further to explicitly call Vladimir Putin a 'war criminal.'¹¹

Yet this idea of a 'rules-based international order' is also not ideology-free. Those rules may start with basic tenets, such as acceptance of state sovereignty and the right to self-defence as ordering principles, but deeper value-based judgements colour how those ordering principles are viewed. For example, that state sovereignty may not be believed to be so absolute in the case of a state failing in its responsibility to protect its citizens, or that sovereignty may be seen to be more or less sacrosanct depending on how the ruling regime responds to the rights-based demands of its citizens.

⁹ J. Ardern, N. Mahuta, P. Henare, *Assistance to Ukraine extended and enhanced*, Press Release, Beehive.govt.nz – The official website of the New Zealand Government, 14 November 2022, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/assistance-ukraine-extended-and-enhanced> [accessed: 12 December 2022].

¹⁰ J. Ardern, N. Mahuta, *Aotearoa New Zealand condemns Russia's invasion of Ukraine*, Press Release, Beehive.govt.nz – The official website of the New Zealand Government, 24 February 2022, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/aotearoa-new-zealand-condemns-russian-invasion-ukraine> [accessed: 12 December 2022].

¹¹ *Putin's Ukraine war creating 'significant war crimes' – Nanaia Mahuta*, Radio New Zealand, 05 April 2022, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/464656/putin-s-ukraine-war-creating-significant-war-crimes-nanaia-mahuta>; *National Party leader Christopher Luxon labels Putin a war criminal, again urges ambassador's removal*, Radio New Zealand, 05 April 2022, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/464672/national-party-leader-christopher-luxon-labels-putin-a-war-criminal-again-urges-ambassador-s-removal> [accessed: 12 January 2023].

The relevance of liberal values

New Zealand has thus been a strong supporter of the idea of a *liberal* rules-based order. Although not necessarily always explicitly stated in foreign policy statements that discuss the idea of a rules based international order, New Zealand governments, leading decision-making in a liberal democratic state populated by people who value individual liberty, have historically valued and promoted liberal concepts such as free trade, representative democracy, human rights, and capitalism.

This also means that successive New Zealand governments have viewed similarly liberal democratic states as being 'like-minded.' Many, although not all, of New Zealand's closest foreign policy and defence relationships are with other liberal democratic states such as the United States, Australia, Canada, and the UK, as well as Japan and the Republic of Korea. This is not the only principle upon which New Zealand forges its partnerships, but it is a key one. This is relevant to the case of Ukraine.

Seen as a fellow democracy, Ukraine's status is enhanced in the eyes of New Zealanders. Russia, on the other hand, is viewed as being in the thrall of a form of dictatorship under Vladimir Putin and associates. Ideologically then, the situation in Ukraine is seen not only as a case of unjustified aggression for one sovereign state against another, but it is also viewed through the lenses of ideology and values, as per normative democratic peace thesis arguments. A less-legitimate Russia has illegally invaded a more-legitimate Ukraine.

The issue of the relevance of this being a *democratic* state under attack has not been aggressively pursued by the New Zealand government in its news releases, with the overwhelming themes being those of betrayal of international law and misuse of the UN system. But the issue of democracy has been noted in New Zealand media and in official news releases in different ways.

In discussing the death of a former NZDF soldier who fought alongside Ukrainian soldiers as an individual volunteer, for example, the Defence Minister, Andrew Little, was reported to have lauded former soldier Kani Te Tai's 'commitment to the democratic values Ukraine is fighting to protect.'¹² Academic commentators emphasised the relevance of the nature of government in each country, with Professor Robert Patman of Otago University asserting that '[t]o date, New Zealand has contributed more than \$40 million in humanitarian and military aid to Ukraine. This is costly for the taxpayer, but the costs for New Zealand and other small and middle powers will be much greater still if the Putin authoritarian regime is allowed to succeed in its brutal attempt to annex a democratic neighbour.'¹³

¹² A. Little cited in A. Gifford, *Te Tai fight for Ukraine democracy lauded*, Waatea news.com, 28 March 2023, <https://waateanews.com/2023/03/28/te-tai-fight-for-ukraine-democracy-lauded/> [accessed: 10 April 2023].

¹³ R.G. Patman, *Is New Zealand doing enough for Ukraine?*, Newsroom 23 February 2023, <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/ideasroom/is-new-zealand-doing-enough-for-ukraine> [accessed: 10 April 2023].

And in a media interview, the Chair of the Northern region Ukrainians Association of New Zealand's Yuriy Gladun similarly emphasised that '[w]e are part of the free world, if one part fails, the other part is weaker. Don't get fooled: New Zealand is not so far away to be outside of that process.'¹⁴

In addition to this ideological facet, other liberal values have also been mentioned. For example, a key liberal foreign policy objective is the freeing up of trade to both facilitate best capitalist practices and to increase economic interdependence to decrease the likelihood of conflict breaking out. Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta has emphasised the economic impacts of the conflict, noting that 'Russia's invasion has severely disrupted critical supply chains and exacerbated food insecurity worldwide.'¹⁵

Indeed, as indicated above, there has been strong bipartisan support for the government to act in support of the Ukraine. It is worth noting, however, that some commentators have suggested that the Ardern government could be accused of engaging in acts of war without a clear procedure in play – actively undermining the importance placed on democratic values. Former Labour Secretary General Mike Smith stated that the country's military involvement had not been debated in Parliament, that the Cabinet's use of discretionary powers was of major concern and that 'we've made those decisions without any procedure as to how they would be authorised.'¹⁶ Similarly, former MP Matt Hobson expressed concern that allowing Ukrainian President Zelensky to address Parliament in December 2022 was an affront to democracy in that there was no intention of having MPs consider the complexities of the war or to discuss New Zealand's growing integration with NATO.¹⁷ Despite these concerns, it appears that support for the defence of Ukraine has thus far been remarkably uncontroversial. Gerry Brownlee, National Party defence spokesperson, for example, confirmed that the 'overwhelming view of the current Parliament is that we should be doing exactly what we're doing.'¹⁸

Collective self-defence

As outlined above, the military side of the New Zealand government's response, Operation Tīeke, has predominantly been framed as an effort aimed at being

¹⁴ Y. Gladun cited in *Plea for more support for Ukrainians in New Zealand: 'Most don't have a home to go back to'*, Radio New Zealand, 14 January 2023, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/482430/plea-for-more-support-for-ukrainians-in-new-zealand-most-don-t-have-a-home-to-go-back-to> [accessed: 12 February 2023].

¹⁵ J. Ardern, N. Mahuta, P. Henare, *Assistance to Ukraine extended and enhanced*, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ M. Smith cited in M. Hall, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ *Former Minister Calls Zelensky Address 'An Affront To Democracy'*, Scoop, 14 December 2022, <https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO2212/S00127/former-minister-calls-zelensky-address-an-affront-to-democracy.htm> [accessed: 16 December 2022].

¹⁸ G. Brownlee cited in M. Hall, *op. cit.*

a response to a breach of international law(s) and at ‘contributing to international efforts to support Ukraine in its self-defence.’¹⁹ As noted above, contemporary international law asserts that a country has a right to use force in self-defence. Moreover, Article 51 of the UN Charter specifically states that this can be a right to ‘collective’ self-defence too.

Support for collective self-defence has been a key theme in New Zealand’s foreign policy. New Zealand had a seat in the League of Nations in 1919 despite not gaining full legal independence until 1947 upon formal adoption of the 1931 Statute of Westminster. New Zealand authorities had been keen supporters of the post-World War I plan to create a collective security system to help ensure international peace and security. This support for collective security continued through after World War II via vocal support for a new organisation to replace the failed League of Nations.

Indeed, in 1945, New Zealand had four main aims for the United Nations: to provide space for small nations and to prevent powerful states from dominating; to maintain international peace and security through collective security; to assist colonies towards statehood; and to help guarantee social and economic progress for all.²⁰ As a small state, New Zealand recognises that it would not necessarily have the capacity to defend itself from external aggression should it need to act alone. Successive New Zealand governments have therefore supported two main mechanisms in seeking to augment its self-defence: alliance-building and collective security.

With respect to the first of these, Ukraine is not an ally, but it can perhaps best be conceived of as a ‘friend of friends.’ The US and NATO are key Ukraine supporters, and are, at the same time, important partners for New Zealand. The broad ideological similarities noted above further tap into the long-standing notion that New Zealand seeks to operate with ‘like-minded’ partners. These factors are not deciding ones but nonetheless augment the other rationales for action outlined above. It is notable, for example, that top NATO officials visited New Zealand in March 2023, and, upon invitation to attend the NATO Leaders Summit in 2023, Prime Minister Chris Hipkins emphasised that ‘[w]e’ve remained, as I’ve always said, independent in our foreign policy and that will continue to be the case. But we will continue to work with like-minded countries. [...] If you look at the situation in Ukraine, for example, we have a lot in common with members of NATO when it comes to our position on that particular conflict.’²¹

¹⁹ *What we Do – Support to Ukraine, op. cit.*

²⁰ D. McKinnon, *Introduction*, [in:] *New Zealand as an International Citizen: Fifty Years of United Nations Membership*, ed. M. Templeton, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Wellington 2005.

²¹ Ch. Hipkins cited in K. Scotcher, *Hipkins yet to decide whether he will attend NATO meeting*, Radio New Zealand, 12 April 2023, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/487743/hipkins-yet-to-decide-whether-he-will-attend-nato-meeting> [accessed: 12 April 2023].

Moreover, the decision to support Ukraine is very much aligned with New Zealand's strong support for the concept of collective security. In contemporary international politics, collective security would ideally be brokered through the UN whereby the Security Council would agree to identify, condemn, and respond collectively to an act of aggression. History demonstrates how difficult it is to attain this degree of cohesion; however, with the only instance of collective self-defence thus far being UN mandate to use 'all necessary means' to push Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait in 1991. Other important events since that time – such as the abstaining of China and Russia from votes on the use of force to stop Libya's Colonel Gaddafi from persecuting civilians in 2011 – have not resulted in a stronger norm of enabling the UN to use force to support international peace and security, and, indeed, if anything, the UN has been more rather than less stymied in recent years.

As Russia is a veto-wielding member of the Security Council, the UNSC is stalemated. In 2003, the Clark-led Labour Government refused to support the war against Iraq without a UNSC mandate, asserting that UNSC authorisation was 'an essential precondition for military strike.'²² But in this case, a UNSC mandate is taken out of the realm of possibility given Russia's P5 status. Indeed, in June 2022, the then Prime Minister Ardern argued that Moscow's 'use of its UN Security Council position to block consideration of the invasion is morally bankrupt,' which 'demonstrates why we must continue to seek reform of the UN.'²³ Without the possibility of being mandated by a UNSC resolution, the New Zealand government must look to other principles upon which to base its decisions. Here, the UN General Assembly provides some degree of succour.

The General Assembly has passed a number of resolutions condemning Russia's 'attempted illegal annexation.'²⁴ However, despite some commentators arguing that there is capacity for more to be done by the General Assembly under the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution, the predominant view remains that the General Assembly can only help to legitimise action, rather than provide legal decisions to support action.²⁵ But in this case, the ideal of collective security, bolstered by General Assembly condemnation, does help to underpin New Zealand's chosen response.

In December 2022, the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky addressed the New Zealand Parliament. In her response to his speech, the then Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern outlined the reasons for New Zealand support. Her response clearly

²² T. O'Brien, *New Zealand and the International System*, [in:] *New Zealand in World Affairs IV: 1990–2005*, ed. R. Alley, Victoria University Press, Wellington 2007, pp. 54–84.

²³ H. Clark cited in R. Patman, *op. cit.*

²⁴ *Ukraine: UN General Assembly demands Russia reverse course on 'attempted illegal annexation'*, UN News, 12 October 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/10/1129492> [accessed: 12 December 2022].

²⁵ S. Talmon, *The Legalizing and Legitimizing Function of UN General Assembly Resolutions*, "AJIL Unbound" 2014, vol. 108, pp. 123–128, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S2398772300002002>.

points to a concern with the need for collective security to thrive despite the lack of institutional mandate: ‘Our support for Ukraine was not determined by geography, it was not determined by history or by diplomatic ties or relationships – our judgment was a simple one: we asked ourselves the question “what if it was us”’.²⁶

Note that in this speech, Ardern again referred to the breach of the international rules-based order and ‘the misuse of multilateral institutions.’ Hence, in a time of dysfunctional international institutions, other means for determining just action must be found.

Finally, in addition to these broad-brush values, it is relevant to note that there seems to be a tacit acceptance within New Zealand that, though we may want to avoid frontline combat, the chosen form of engagement in this case – a Building Partner Capacity (BPC) form of engagement – is seen as an acceptable compromise. At least since 2015 (though the practice clearly predates this) and the sending of troops to Iraq to train Iraqi soldiers to help fight ISIL, at the Iraqi government’s request, the practice of BPC has not elicited any significant resistance. Hence, contributing to collective self-defence may take many forms, including training and sending material support, and it need not involve the NZDF in much more controversial active combat roles.

Although all these broader legal and ideological arguments for the Ukraine deployment clearly do have strong historical and bipartisan roots, in more recent years we have also heard of a more instrumental rationale for deployment – that of providing an opportunity to deploy to help stem, or at least slow, a growing retention problem within the military.

Domestic rationales for deployment: benefits for the NZDF

Towards the end of 2022, in outlining reasons for the extension and enhancement of Operation Tīeke, Defence Minister Peeni Henare pursued a slightly different tack from the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. In his comments, he noted the importance of the deployment for domestic purposes. That is, Henare highlighted the value of the training role for both the Ukrainian recruits receiving the training *and* for the NZDF personnel gaining ‘valuable experience’ in delivering that training. Most revealing, however, was his direct reference to the notion that the deployment would help to ‘encourage retention of frontline personnel.’²⁷

²⁶ J. Ardern cited in *Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky addresses New Zealand Parliament*, Radio New Zealand, 14 December 2022, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/480691/ukrainian-president-volodymyr-zelensky-addresses-new-zealand-parliament> [accessed: 14 December 2022].

²⁷ J. Ardern, N. Mahuta, P. Henare, *Assistance to Ukraine extended and enhanced*, *op. cit.*

The NZDF has experienced significant retention issues in recent years. Some units, particularly some of those based in the New Zealand Army, have lost up to a third of their capacity. In addition to speculation about the push and pull of perceived decreased benefits and the increasingly tempting draw of higher paid civilian employment in a low unemployment market, one of the suggested causes for such attrition that has gained traction is the tying up of defence personnel in Operation Protect over the years 2020–2022.

Operation Protect constituted part of the New Zealand government's management of the COVID-19 pandemic. To control the spread of the virus, the Government not only restricted the movement of the population within the country but also pursued a very strict border control policy. Apart from a short-lived experiment with a 'travel bubble' with Australia in mid-2021, those travelling to New Zealand over 2020 and into early 2022 were required to isolate within Managed Isolation Quarantine Facilities (MIQ) for at least 10 days. In staffing these MIQs and domestic checkpoints, the Government was especially reliant on drawing on personnel from NZDF – and within the NZDF, this work fell disproportionately to the Army to carry out. This deployment wound up in early 2022 but is believed to have impacted the 'core business' for the NZDF.

NZDF personnel had three main roles in staffing MIQ and checkpoints under Operation Protect: security, day-to-day operations within each facility, and leadership roles across regional centres and the national office in Wellington. The Director General of Health, under the COVID-19 Public Health Response Act 2020, granted these personnel specific enforcement powers, with personnel in MIQs being empowered to give legally enforceable directions (such as requiring a person to stay in their room), and to request a person to provide identifying information, whilst those staffing vehicle checkpoints and providing support to the New Zealand Customs Service were again similarly empowered to enter areas, buildings, vehicles, give directions, and request a person to provide identifying information. Such work was deemed by some as being demanding and unfulfilling as well as not what 'they had trained for' and, therefore, acting as a distraction from core business. Many believed that it produced a significant skill fade of core military skills within the force.

For example, in June 2021, the Chief of Defence Force, Kevin Short reported to the Minister of Defence, Peeni Henare that he was 'conscious that the NZDFs ability to respond to a Christchurch [type] of Kaikōura scale earthquake, or a Pacific event of the size of Tropical Cyclone Winston in Fiji, will remain degraded for the foreseeable future' and that the commitment 'reduces the capability of the NZDF to respond to another national or regional emergency with previously expected scale or speed.'²⁸

²⁸ K. Short cited in J. Patterson, *Defence Force role in MIQ 'reduces capability' to deal with major disaster*, Radio New Zealand, 13 August 2021, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/449077/defence-force-role-in-miq-reduces-capability-to-deal-with-major-disaster> [accessed: 09 April 2022].

Operation Protect was the main effort of the NZDF over 2020–2022 and impacted everything from training to infrastructure projects. Engagement in Operation Protect significantly impacted the NZDF's ability to maintain other operational outputs and also affected morale as personnel became frustrated by the long hours, rolling deployments away from family, and lack of time spent on 'core business' of their trades. For example, the Annual Review of the New Zealand Defence Force listed work that was not done in 2020/21, largely because of the impact of COVID-19 and the lack of resource— more than 50 projects in total.²⁹

In 2021, the attrition rate for all regular force personnel sat at just under 8%. By the end of 2022, attrition across the entire defence force was at 17.4%, with more than 25% attrition occurring in certain trades including combat, armoured combat and combat engineers.³⁰ Hence an international deployment – a chance to engage in the type of work seen to be more central to the role of those who had joined a military service – is seen as a way to help retain (and potentially to recruit) personnel.

Conclusion

Reporting about the impact of New Zealand engagement via Operation Tīeke has generally been framed in a positive way. In late 2022, Defence Minister Henare stated:

I have been informed that the Ukrainian recruits have responded well to our training personnel and have said that the NZDF personnel are working hard for them. [...] While the New Zealand military contribution to our bigger partners and Ukraine is small compared to what others are doing, we are contributing in a targeted way and I am confident that our contributions are having a continued impact.³¹

Moreover, a change in the New Zealand leadership, with the resignation of Prime Minister Ardern and the swearing in of Chris Hipkins, has simply seen a reiteration of support to Ukraine. The NZDF's engagement in support of Ukraine is uncontroversial, possibly even popular within a domestic setting, tethered as it is both to ongoing (over)use of the NZDF for the pursuit of foreign policy goals and to long-standing foreign and defence policy principles. Support for an international rules-based order, support for like-minded liberal states, and support for the ideal of collective security are all accepted premises for New Zealand policy. But the deployments also bring

²⁹ K. Knight, *MIQ: The two-year tour of duty no soldier wanted*, New Zealand Herald, 25 March 2022, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/miq-and-operation-protect-the-two-year-tour-of-duty-no-soldier-expected/MV4UXDZCS2HQGMXIJ6MDPMBZ4Y/> [accessed: 09 April 2022].

³⁰ T. Manch, *Army attrition above 15% as units and ranks depleted by quitting soldiers*, Stuff, 11 November 2022, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/130440514/army-attrition-above-15-as-units-and-ranks-depleted-by-quitting-soldiers> [accessed: 10 April 2023].

³¹ J. Ardern, N. Mahuta, P. Henare, *Assistance to Ukraine extended and enhanced*, *op. cit.*

a less obvious, but still important, benefit for the NZDF itself. As attrition rates have soared, this engagement provides a chance for personnel to perform roles that they see as being more in keeping with their expectations about soldiering or military taskings. Hence, the deployment serves both foreign and domestic agendas, at least for now, as New Zealand also holds fast to the notion of having an independent foreign policy and may resist pressure to become more firmly integrated into a US or NATO-led coalition of sorts or to engage in a more direct fashion past the BPC model.

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*The New Zealand Defence Force and Ukraine:
military contributions to foreign and defence policy*

Abstract

New Zealand has demonstrated strong support for Ukraine since the Russian invasion of February 2022. From logistical support to infantry training, the NZDF has been a key player in helping to deliver on the New Zealand government's general statements of support. Though located far from the conflict, New Zealand's traditional values of support for international law, democracy and collective security in the face of external aggression have all been major drivers for these deployments. But certain other drivers, such as recent problems with recruitment and retention in the armed forces, are perhaps lesser known but also important in rounding out an understanding of why and how New Zealand has responded to the situation.

Keywords: NZDF, Ukraine, collective security, international law