

## **Concern for Aotearoa's security with Aotearoa's values fosters peace**

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UNANZ Secondary School Speech Award 2019: *“Does our concern for security compromise peace?”*

Tēnā koutou i tēnei ahiahi, good afternoon everyone. Two bombs have gone off. A Dutch citizen is dead and 8 spies are loose in Auckland. The year is 1985 and the Greenpeace vessel, the *Rainbow Warrior* has just been sunk by French intelligence in New Zealand territory. There hasn't been another such violation of our sovereignty to this day, but it's still fresh in our minds as a reminder that even at the bottom of the Pacific we find ourselves vulnerable to malicious interests overseas. In response, we maintain our defence forces and position ourselves strategically throughout the South Pacific. In this speech I argue that any country's concern for security can compromise peace, but that the work of the United Nations and the moral foreign policy of New Zealand have challenged that paradigm.

We have an ongoing debate about what our priorities are: do we benefit more from trade with China than from the security offered by the United States? Regardless of your own thoughts, you can notice dissent either way, and that is exactly the point. In most developed countries with a Western background, including our neighbours Australia, the response would be overwhelmingly pro-American; and opinion polling from just last year reinforces this.

But in New Zealand we have championed what we call an “independent foreign policy”, refusing to be dominated by the interests of one global superpower. Most of the time we hear that phrase it's in the context of the questions I just asked, and it's true that it allows us to be adaptable, and get trade and security benefits at the same time. But what's not discussed as much is how an independent foreign policy empowers us to change our understanding of security. There are a couple of key issues to talk about: what's included when we discuss “security”, and how that affects the stability of the international system.

During the Cold War, a man named John Herz coined the term “security dilemma”. Inspired by the arms race between the US and the Soviet Union, and the causes of the first World War, international relations scholars and politicians alike began to accept that being more secure can mean provoking threats too. The theory says that as a country arms itself in defense, other countries could interpret that as preparing for aggression, because they don't know the true intentions of the country.

But this model relies on a traditional understanding of security, where the referent object, or the thing being threatened, is the nation state and its sovereignty, and it's being threatened by a

military, by missiles and guns. Ask any American president and they'll probably see security the same way, as would many countries that still have the mindset of the Cold War. But in 2019, in New Zealand, our ports aren't threatened much more by French bombs than our Bledisloe cup titles are threatened by Australia, i.e. hardly, if at all. This is due to two key influences of the United Nations.

Firstly, the post-Cold War UN has seen an increase in government initiatives to support peacemaking missions sevenfold, and since the end of the Cold War there have been 40% fewer armed conflicts than before. The "security dilemma" assumed that states had no idea of each other's intentions and so always assumed the worst, but after the divisiveness of the Cold War the UN has been reinvigorated as a forum for constructive discussion, diplomacy, and, at the most basic level, communication between countries. This mutual understanding has greatly reduced any, well, misunderstanding of what an increase in defensive capabilities actually means. But even more significantly, the UN itself professes a belief in human security. Human security, as opposed to traditional security, focusses on individual people as the referent objects, the things being threatened, and sees the threats as much more than missiles and guns.

It sees societal discrimination, political oppression, food security and climate change as threats. It offers with it a more optimistic view of the world, where humans, not tanks, are important, and this optimism is infectious. Perhaps not quite as much as we'd like it to be, but in Aotearoa, with our renowned independent and morally-driven foreign policy, this new lens fit perfectly. Yes, we just spent \$2billion dollars on military equipment, but we're spending \$14billion on meeting our Paris agreement commitments, and billions more in our development aid under the "Pacific Reset" project. When we help our island neighbours and protect our people from climate change, what we're doing is keeping the world stable, and helping to maintain peace in our region as well.

In conclusion, centuries of conflict have told us that when states don't communicate effectively, and have concern for their defense, this can compromise peace, because in self-interest they tend to assume the worst. But the UN in recent decades has provided a forum for enhanced communication in response, and to prevent the issue in the first place NZ's values have allowed them to readily adopt what the UN promotes as human security: the kind about which a country can be concerned without compromising peace. Does our concern for security compromise peace? Yes, always, but how much depends on how we view security, and for NZ, our concern for our type of security can bolster peace instead. Our foreign policy is justified by *tangata ako ana i te whare, te turanga ki te marae, tau ana*, a whakataukī saying in this context that if you care for the peace of your people, then in international society there will be peace too. Kia ora.