



**NEW ZEALAND'S
FOREIGN POLICY
AT A TIME OF
GEOPOLITICAL
STRESS**

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KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE LECTURE

1. Give a historical overview of NZ's foreign policy over the past decade and a half
2. Examine how the changing geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific has affected NZ's threat perceptions
3. Consider how NZ's relationship with China is changing
4. Offer some insights into the Pacific and NZ's juggling act there
5. Dismiss the notion of NZ as having an independent foreign policy
6. Give some thoughts about the trajectory of NZ's foreign policy

NEW ZEALAND'S FOREIGN POLICY 2005-2020

- Since the mid-2000s, New Zealand has adopted a grand strategy of hedging for its foreign policy
- I coined this an “asymmetrical alignment hedge”
 - The basic tenets of an asymmetrical hedge are that a relatively smaller power aligns itself in terms of security with a much larger security guarantor while concurrently pursuing strong (usually trade focused) relations with another (often rival) large power
- NZ has concurrently strengthened security relations with the US but at the same time has developed the most mature relationship with China out of any of the Anglosphere countries
 - Why? Regional geopolitical environment conducive to hedging

SECURITIZATION OF THE INDO-PACIFIC

- In 2018, NZ foreign minister, Winston Peters unequivocally ruled out NZ adopting an Indo-Pacific outlook
 - NZ typically had a Pacific focus and used the term Asia-Pacific to describe the wider region
- But, since 2019, and increased under the current government, NZ has concretely adopted the Indo-Pacific concept
 - Why? It aligns with the broader securitization dynamics emerging in NZ's geopolitical vicinity
- The Indo-Pacific discourse shifted in 2017 when the US firmly adopted the concept and designated China as a strategic rival
 - Key securitization dynamic is the clear identification of China as an existential threat to the rules based international order

RE-ENGAGING THE ANGLOSPHERE

- The securitization of the Indo-Pacific in NZ has led to cracks appearing in its asymmetrical hedging strategy
- NZ has sought to re-engage its traditional allies in the Anglosphere
 - Flirtation with AUKUS a key component of this
 - But also, involved in NATO IP 4 group
 - UK FTA (+ EU FTA) has a geopolitical aspect to it (to help diversify away from China)
- Ultimately, this kind of behaviour resembles more closely a “balancing” strategy that resembles what Australia has been doing since the 2010s
 - Clearly, it is to balance the perceived growing threat of China

CHINA AS THE DRAGON IN THE ROOM

- The big concern in Wellington is clearly China and how dependent NZ has become on China as an export destination
- Up until the early 2020s, NZ and China routinely spoke of a “mature” relationship
 - NZ was/is something of an outlier in the Anglosphere with regards to China
 - Chinese state media often used NZ as a best practice case for how a Western country should engage with China
- But the rise of China and the increasing belief of China as a potential existential threat to the rules based order (central to NZ’s ontological security) has shifted NZ’s tone significantly
 - Diversifying away from China is hard and if to be successful will take time
 - But under this government, China’s importance has been noticeably relegated

BLUE PACIFIC LIP SERVICE

- Oceania (or, the Pacific) has long been NZ's most central foreign policy concern
 - Obviously, there are colonial legacies at play, but since 2018's Pacific Reset, NZ has made a concerted effort to be a better partner there
- Much has been made of the growing great power competition in the Pacific and the vulnerability of these states, but the PICs have not been passive in their response
 - Blue Pacific as an ontologically distinct alternative to the Indo-Pacific...
 - Key point: climate change is the existential threat, not China
- NZ is a signatory to the Blue Pacific but in recent times, it is not emphasised much
 - NZ falling back into paternalistic modes with its Pacific engagement

“DEPENDENTLY INDEPENDENT”

- NZ’s self belief as being an independent international actor strongly entrenched in the strategic culture of NZ’s foreign policymaking
- But NZ’s apparent shift in foreign policy has elicited significant domestic debate around whether it is abandoning its independent foreign policy
- My take: NZ’s apparent independence was a product of a benign regional geopolitical environment more than it being a central foreign policy doctrine
 - Independent foreign policy not a prime driver of foreign policy; more an aspiration
- As the regional geopolitical situation has changed markedly in the past eight years, NZ has adopted, even under the previous Labour governments, a more ‘realist’ approach

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

- It is clear to me that shifts are occurring in NZ's foreign policy
- The asymmetrical alignment of the previous decades is seen as a negative
 - In reality, NZ is forced to maintain this for the time being because diversifying away from China difficult and will take time
- NZ wants to balance China which explains efforts to re-engage with the Anglosphere and, in particular, participate in AUKUS (albeit, the pillar 2 aspect)
- NZ likely to become more critical of China and push back on China's growing Pacific engagement
 - Re-engaging with China dependent on the securitization dynamics (these are hard to undo)