The 2018 Strategic Defence Statement: Ten Different Views from Massey Scholars

With the aim of broadening views on Defence matters in this document we asked a range of academics at Massey to respond to the new 2018 Strategic Defence Statement from their own point of view. Contributors include Rouben Azizian (Centre for Defence & Security Studies, CDSS), David Belgrave (College of Humanities and Social Sciences), Shine Choi (Politics), Beth Greener (Politics), Nina Harding (Anthropology), Wil Hoverd (CDSS), Lucas Knotter (Politics), Helen Leslie (Development Studies), Anna Powles (CDSS), and Gerard Prinsen (Development Studies).

What do you find of most interest in this new Statement?

Azizian: In the absence of a national security strategy, the Defence Statement basically represents the Government’s major strategic thinking and approach. The Defence Statement is noticeably much more critical of China than any other official NZ government policy/strategy statement. It also acknowledges the current crisis in international liberal agenda and questions the commitment of traditional champions of liberal order to the promotion of international rules and norms. The document appreciates the Indo-Pacific concept which is being promoted by the United States, Australia and Japan but prefers to adhere to the conventional definition of the region as Asia-Pacific. The section on the Pacific avoids any reference to the lack of good governance and a rampant corruption in the Pacific Island nations. Interestingly,
China’s alternative non-liberal model of development criticized elsewhere in the Statement is not addressed in the Pacific Islands context either.

**What do you think the Statement has right?**

**Azizian:** The Statement reflects a broad multi-party political agreement on key security issues. The document is comprehensive in its coverage of defence and strategic issues, inclusive in terms of considering both state and community interests and candid in the assessment of New Zealand’s security challenges and security partners. The policy statement aligns defence policy settings with the new Government’s foreign policy and national security priorities. It raises the priority of the South Pacific and the importance of assisting the Pacific Island nations in managing the impacts of climate change as well as the well-being of Pacific partners. The Statement acknowledges the return of geopolitics and the growing importance of spheres of influence. It emphasizes the expansive maritime environment of New Zealand and the evolving challenges in protecting it, to include ongoing shifts in the regional order.

**What do you think could be improved upon?**

**Azizian:** The policy statement is a product of the collaborative interagency process but hasn’t been discussed with the broader expert community. The document repeatedly refers to New Zealand’s commitment to a rules based international order but doesn’t elaborate on the rules themselves or how they should be developed and shaped. Nor does the statement clarify if New Zealand needs to be more proactive in safeguarding and shaping the rules. The defence force responsibilities are too broad and not clearly prioritized. The Statement makes contradictory statements on Russia. In para 85, it claims that Russia is seeking to "restore historical levels of influence." In para 86, it suggests that Russia is seeking "greater influence" in former Soviet republics. None of those statements are accurate. In the context of the Statement's reference of growing importance of spheres of influence the more accurate assessment of Russia's behaviour would be "seeking to prevent further losses in the claimed sphere of influence."

**Is there anything you would add to the Statement?**

**Azizian:** In its assessment of the regional order in the Asia-Pacific (para 126), the Statement doesn't address the ongoing competition over the regional security architecture and the role of ASEAN in ensuring the stability of rules based regional order. ASEAN is discussed in the Southeast Asia section with a very general reference to its centrality but not in the context of competing approaches to multilateralism or departures from multilateralism. The document doesn’t discuss or even acknowledge internal inhibitors to the effective functioning of the defence force, political, bureaucratic and other. The absence of such analysis could challenge the development of a political consensus on the role of the defence force and its funding, especially in view of the upcoming Defence Capability Plan Review 2018. The other missing section is the relevance of education and training of the defence force and next steps in that direction. There is no reference, for example, to the intention of establishing a defence academy.
What do you find of most interest in this new Statement?

Choi: As expected of a government document on defence, the story here is of good people preparing to fight the bad stuff that causes disruption of the good stuff that good people value. In the official public text the goodies remain the same – New Zealand, of course followed by Australia, the US, the UK and Canada, in the first order, and other (fellow?) smaller states maybe in the second order. In terms of traditional security actors, Russia is definitely the baddy, and so is North Korea. China is sort of a good guy, which gets established only in contrast to Russia. What I found interesting was how this division between good and bad guys was established through the fear of ‘closed societies’ and the dangers and vulnerability of being an open society. For me, this raised the question, what are ‘closed societies’ beyond the shorthand used in the Statement, ‘liberal democracy’? Problematically, this assumes that closed-ness of a political community is a characteristic of that society rather than something that also, or even more so, reflects the society’s relationship with the larger international community and what orders the international.

What do you think the Statement has right?

Choi: I know this is an odd thing to comment on, but I found the images – not only the photographs but also the choice of map and the 3-circle diagram on threat conceptualization – useful and interesting. As someone who studies visual global politics, I think image-text relation is not one of where images are secondary to the hard real stuff texts say. Regardless of the intent behind those who compiled this document, the images say something distinct from the policy arguments. Firstly, the norms that New Zealand values are not the rules-based international order but norms about the defence force, of what the military looks like when it is community and value-oriented. Many of the human-centric photographic images foreground this. This raises many questions, not the least the question, is this how a society that prides itself as an open society becomes militarized? Why are these non-military needs and engagements with communities happening through the Defence Force? To what effect?

What do you think could be improved upon?

Choi: Besides the shorthand on closed societies, there is also a fear in the document of emerging forces, of change, and disruptions to the status quo international order and trade. So there is an assumption in the document that things have been, at some point, good and now things are getting harder, less certain and therefore require new constellation of technologies, alliances, and preparedness. I highlight this assumption because for many other small states around the world, the status quo international order has never worked for them but for New Zealand it seem to have – why? How so? I am here pointing to a particular enmity line operating in the Statement that positions New Zealand interests and values squarely on the side of its traditional Cold War and colonial partners. This is good to know and useful to put out in the open because with the new Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern and cultural rumblings on decolonization, one cannot be faulted for thinking New Zealand is heading elsewhere. The document should put this position of New Zealand in the forefront instead of burying it in text.
Is there anything you would add to the Statement?

Choi: Policy documents are perhaps not a place to provide a more historically-attuned and conceptually sound discussion of what drives a country’s defense and foreign policies. But reading the document, I did not even get the sense that the persons involved in articulating the country’s policies had an awareness of what underpins the policies and who/what their enemies are. If true, this is troubling.

What do you find of most interest in this new Statement?

Belgrave: The Statement has brought New Zealand’s stated strategic outlook full circle. For the first time since the Defence Review 1966, Wellington has publicly identified China as a challenger to New Zealand’s interests and security. Between 1950 and 1968 the New Zealand government identified the People’s Republic as the most significant threat to New Zealand’s interests in South East Asia. Only a lack of industrial and technological capacity prevented Beijing from being able to threaten Australasia as Japan had done in 1942. Decades of unprecedented economic growth since then has allowed China to exert enough hard and its own kind of soft power to begin to reshape the international order. After many years of denying a specific dilemma between Chinese economic opportunity and Chinese military power, Wellington has publicly accepted that this is as much a problem for New Zealand as it is the other countries of the region. Politicians and officials have been aware of this potential dilemma for many years, but the new government has chosen to make a statement to its allies, the New Zealand public, and indeed China itself.

What do you think the Statement has right?

Belgrave: The Defence Statement covers a wide range of strategic issues for a policy update. It does so with frankness and clarity. It has outlined rightly the increasing challenges in the region and globally since the last white paper was produced. This is important as it primes everyone for the difficult choices New Zealand could have to make in the coming years. Just like during the mid-1960s, the NZDF finds itself needing expensive upgrades just at the time regional tensions are rising. The P-3 Orion, C-130H Hercules, and the recently replaced UH-1 Iroquois were all initially purchased in the Vietnam War era. The last of the equipment from that era must be replaced soon, with the purchase of the P-8A Poseidons just the first in a large number of expensive acquisitions. Establishing the need for these purchases is a vital to convince a public that can be sceptical of expensive defence upgrades. The update does a good job outlining the strategic challenges pushing the need for those purchases.

What do you think could be improved upon?

Belgrave: The update is well-reasoned and presented. However, we should be careful not to overstate the importance of this update. The statement is not a full white paper and is simply an update to reflect the changing international political environment and the priorities of the new government. There is no sign that there has been a “crash” programme to quickly or significantly reshape New Zealand defence policy in a fresh white paper. The statement should not be seen as a significant shift
in defence policy, even if it shows a greater willingness to draw concern over the actions of powers such as China and Russia. Statements of defence posture must always be taken with some care. The current government has chosen to be more direct in stating the actors that are challenging the international norms that New Zealand values. However, this document does a good job of recognising the challenges faced by New Zealand, without overstating risks posed by any one actor and risking significant diplomatic ramifications.

**Is there anything you would add to the Statement?**

**Belgrave:** While this statement covers the broad issues very well, it could have provided for greater public debate on future procurement decisions. The purchases being explored are mentioned in the report and an overall strategic rationale for upgrades is provided, but some more specific information on the utility of each purchase would be useful for public discourse. The announcement of the purchase of the P-8As came at much the same time as the policy statement. Given that, it could have been an opportunity to provide a good amount of detail on the missions that the P-8A will handle and how this provides both a continuation of and improvement upon the roles of the P-3s they will replace.

**What do you find of most interest in this new Statement?**

**Greener:** There are a few surprises here – the emphasis on the UKUSA partnership seems a slightly odd choice, though politically useful for its ambiguity in that it allows an ongoing commitment to the US but ties this to a broader arrangement. Also interesting is the explicit emphasis on defence as part of community responses to disasters, the naming of ‘complex disrupters’ and concerns about the potential disruption of political systems by social media and infrastructure building. Lastly, I think the statement that developments have “crystallised a sense that non-democratic and democratic systems are in strategic competition” is intriguing. Not only do we continue to have strong relationships with some countries that practice patronage-based politics, but the rise of illiberalism and populism, noted by the Statement, is occurring in a number of sites across the globe, so it isn’t particularly clear how the emphasis on ‘democracy’ as a key value is to be reflected in our defence relationships.

**What do you think the Statement has right?**

**Greener:** I like the express recognition of an ‘obligation’ to contribute to upholding a rules-based order. The new focus on Defence as a part of the community is a double-edged sword – it recognises what already happens in practice, as in responses to disasters and the like, but care needs to be taken regarding potential militarisation too. It is also important that the Statement has a degree of balance. That is, it notes that China has engaged in activities we are less sure about, such as in refusing to recognise the Permanent Court of Arbitration’s ruling over the South China Sea, whilst also noting concerns about existing allies, such as the US, where mention is made of the withdrawal from the Paris Climate Conference and the TPPA. The emphasis on space and cyber is interesting – a local capacity to control information could be useful if we do fall out with existing partners that currently provide this capability. However, strong oversight is needed to ensure that these don’t impinge upon civil liberties too.
What do you think could be improved upon?

**Greener:** The emphasis on the need to pursue interoperability with Australia is very strong. Although I can agree that the relationship with Australia is important New Zealand also has a comparative advantage in places like the Pacific by virtue of being different from Australia. Too strong an emphasis on interoperability threatens to dilute that difference. The same goes for other relationships. Moreover, there are some Australian policies and practices, such as those with respect to asylum seekers or the detention and deportation of New Zealand citizens, which diverge significantly from New Zealand’s priorities. To that end, a clearer spelling out of just what New Zealand’s ‘enduring values’ are and as to whose rules, and which rules we are seeking to uphold in this ‘rules-based order’ would have been welcome. I also think this Statement adds to taskings for the NZDF, a list that is already much too long.

Is there anything you would add to the Statement?

**Greener:** Yes! There is no mention of the Women, Peace and Security agenda despite this being something that the Defence Minister recently claimed was something that New Zealand ‘champions’. Without reference to the WPS in such important documents it is all too easy for government agencies to then not have to prioritise such projects. And I’d be interested to interrogate the notions of values and order more – what are we wanting to see more of in the world today, and why?

---

**Dr Nina Harding**  
(Anthropology programme)

---

What do you find of most interest in this new Statement?

**Harding:** I am interested in what impact this statement might have on Defence Force members on the ground, and note that its primary focus is a need for them to be “adaptive, innovative people” (214), because a complex and shifting international environment “will have implications for the nature and type of operations” (206). The statement argues that not only will current tasks become more challenging (125, 170) but new tasks will emerge: defence will “have to act with new urgency, in new ways, and at new levels” (150) in “non-routine interventions” (246). Specific fields mentioned include conservation (184) and HADR (in which NZDF already engages). While my colleagues might ask whether Defence is the best fit for some of these diverse tasks, given the likelihood that it will be NZDF members engaging in them, I focus here on what the statement might say about what type of training would be provided to enable them.

What do you think the Statement has right?

**Harding:** The recognition that Defence’s capabilities need to be of “broad utility” (30; 265) - where “people” are listed as its first capability in the document’s holistic definition of this term (217) - is important. Switching between the range of tasks already required of NZDF members can already be challenging- as, for example, when infantry troops whose primary training is geared towards combat-readiness need to adjust their habitual ways of holding themselves to engage with scared communities during HADR operations. Moreover, because training specific to envisaged new tasks would provide
new skills and challenges, it would benefit NZDF members themselves, help make the Defence Force an attractive employer, and aid in addressing retention problems.

**What do you think could be improved upon?**

**Harding:** However, the policy’s statement that “this increasing number of activities will not necessarily require a significant change in the nature of Defence Force capabilities” (247) indicates that more thought could be given to what personnel will need if they are expected to engage in such a wide range of tasks. Training is not extensively discussed in a capabilities section that tends to focus on equipment. However when it is (in a section entitled “combat capable”), there appears to be an assumption that training in traditional combat capabilities is the basis of an ability to effectively perform other tasks also: “well-trained and operationally prepared ground forces provide effective land combat capabilities that the government can deploy to a wide range of tasks [...] these land force elements are flexible and can be configured to respond to a range of tasks” (223).

**Is there anything you would add to the Statement?**

**Harding:** United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Including 1325 in a policy statement that outlines Defence’s overall priorities could have provided further support to draw on for those people within the Defence Force who are currently working to try and embed this resolution in its structures. Given how much the document emphasises that the actions taken by Defence are in support of national values (values which are in general under-defined in the document), explicitly including Women, Peace and Security would also have been a strong statement on the importance of gender equality to New Zealand.

**What do you find of most interest in this new Statement?**

**Hoverd:** Of particular interest, was that Defence Minister Ron Mark made a commitment to making the defence force more open and transparent, and that it would improve trust and confidence with the New Zealand public. This is clearly necessary. The defence force is excellent at generating strong public relations when on deployment. It is not so good at public relations when it comes to the ethics of the political fallout over widespread water contamination or reassuring the public operations in Afghanistan were legal and humane. It is promising that the minister made overtures to improve this space. But his words need to be backed up by action.

**What do you think the Statement has right?**

**Hoverd:** The Statement’s priorities reflect an alignment with the new Government’s Pacific reset and ongoing challenges, including how to balance the combat capability central to our defence forces while delivering humanitarian and disaster relief to the Asia Pacific region as well as these new transnational threats. The three changes in the international threat environment that might affect New Zealand Defence Force operational capabilities for the future (great power competition between the US and China, climate change and cyber / space) all point to important new avenues of future...
thinking for the defence force. The deployment of resources to Antarctica is also an important part of the document – the unsaid part of the Antarctic discussion being that New Zealand needs to be seen to be exercising its shaky territorial claim to that continent, a sovereign claim that other nations will contest if they can.

**What do you think could be improved upon?**

**Hoverd**: The commitment to maintaining a combat-capable defence force provides a signal this Government is not going to have a discussion about whether we actually need all these capabilities in the first place. These are expensive capabilities and the rationale for why we need offensive capabilities is not contested. Neither is the radical thought that we could move to a stabilisation force structure rather than a combat-capable force structure. This leads into the ongoing challenge of how the defence force balances a combat-capability focus with delivering humanitarian and disaster relief to the Asia Pacific region? I suggest this challenge creates an internal balancing tension when it comes to planning, training, the allocation of resources and future acquisitions – a tension that must be negotiated by defence decision makers, from generals right down to those serving on the front line.

**Is there anything you would add to the Statement?**

**Hoverd**: This is a document about strategic direction and capability, but a focus on personnel and personnel development is missing. Retention, training and workforce diversity are ongoing challenges for the defence force and ultimately we can have all the ships, cyber capabilities and aircraft in the world, but if we lack the personnel to deploy them, these platforms offer no utility. The defence workforce is the lifeblood of the organisation. A diverse, happy workforce representing the demographics of our society is the best way to fulfil defence force's new principle of embodying and promoting New Zealand's values. It was notable that at the launch of the policy statement there were approximately 100 senior officers who were mostly aged, primarily Pākehā and only one uniformed woman was present. I hope that this is not the future of the NZDF workforce as the NZDF needs to be vigilant that it places its workforce and equity in the forefront of everything it does – this should be enshrined in policy.

**Dr Lucas Knotter (Politics programme)**

**What do you find of most interest in this new Statement?**

**Knotter**: For me, the most interesting aspect of this document is its emphasis on the so-called ‘international rules-based order’, and its focus on strengthening and maintaining it. On the face of it, this makes perfect sense for a relatively small international actor like New Zealand. Insofar New Zealand cannot (only) rely on its material defence capacities for its continued existence in the international arena, it has to buy into the ordering principles of international law, diplomacy, economic interdependence, and liberal international institutions. In other words, New Zealand has a big stake in maintaining and cultivating an international political order based on rules rather than simple power.
What do you think the Statement has right?

Knotter: I thought this document nicely outlined the complexity of factors that may disrupt the existing order. Much has already been said about the role that this document (tentatively) allocates to China as one of the potential ‘pressuring forces’ of the international order, but I thought the acknowledgement of the internal and non-human challenges to New Zealand’s place in the world deserves equal attention. In my view, internal issues such as wealth inequality, immigration, and public disillusion with political institutions, as well as ‘non-state’ ‘disrupters’ like climate change, cyber-security, and new military technologies, are rightly highlighted as important developments of the future of the rules-based international order and New Zealand’s place in it.

What do you think could be improved upon?

Knotter: The Defence Statement would have done well to more elaborately explain which rules-based international order it is referring to. This defence statement seems to align itself with its traditional security partners, such as the US and Australia, suggesting that this is order is promoted by and found in (among others) countries such as this. However, we may question whether these specific states ever subscribed to or cultivated an international order based on rules rather than self-interest. Given both Australia’s and the US’s explicit and long-standing rejection of certain essential institutions and documents underpinning the liberal international ‘order’, these questions would have been fitting in this document. Put more generally, I think that this document could have framed NZ’s changing international environment more as a transformation of certain rules, orders, and international actors, instead of as a disruption to supposedly orderly rules of international relations.

Is there anything you would add to the Statement?

Knotter: There seems to be little effort to in fact identify what such an international rules-based order means. The document seems to simply assume that its nature and merit is obvious, let alone call into question its existence. To what extent has there ever been an international ‘order’ based on ‘rules’? Which order are we talking about, and based on whose rules? More fundamentally, I would personally argue that the very existence of a defence force equipped with military technologies presupposes the lack of an international rules-based order. While the defence statement obviously underlines NZ Defence Force’s commitment to operate ‘in accordance with both domestic and international law’, I maintain that a truly rules-based international order would make such a commitment unnecessary.

What do you find of most interest in this new Statement?

Leslie: The discussion on the security environment is very clearly articulated and strategic in outlook. The Outcomes to be reached are also ambitious enough for this to be a forward thinking statement. This is particularly interesting as the strategic environment is changing rapidly, and the Outcomes are an effort to formulate broad ranging but arguably achievable goals for New Zealand within this dynamic environment.
**What do you think the Statement has right?**

**Leslie:** I like the focus on interoperability. This recognises the limitations that New Zealand faces as a small state with limited resources, and seeks to identify how we can make valuable contributions in a larger context. This also helps us to focus on how New Zealand fits within a broader partnership framework and who we think we are likely to be needing to work with in the future – in this case Australia in particular and the UKUSA partners in general are clearly identified as likely partners.

**What do you think could be improved upon?**

**Leslie:** What would you suggest could be done to improve the Defence Statement? A key issue here was in fact the structure and content of the document. I found the statement to be a bit repetitive and it was difficult to distinguish between the sections/chapters – I think it needs to be pared back and the sections conflated where it makes sense to do so. This can be a result of a team of authors being directed to bring together a variety of views and angles within one document, but in this case a more concise relaying of the key points would have improved the overall delivery of the main ideas laid out in the Statement.

**Is there anything you would add to the Statement?**

**Leslie:** The Statement needed to place greater emphasis on Defence’s role in disaster response and security in the Pacific. In particular, there needed to be more discussion about how Defence works with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) to provide policy coherence for development. Mention also needed to be made of the work with other civilian partners to support and enhance Pacific island countries capacity and capability before, during and after a disaster event. Most importantly, there should be mention of MFAT’s interagency Pacific Framework here. There is also no mention of the Defence force’s commitment to gender equality and greater professionalism across all three parts of the Force. These would be welcome additions.

**What do you find of most interest in this new Statement?**

**Powles:** From a strategic perspective, the Statement was inevitably going to be scrutinised closely because it is the strongest statement by the Government to date on the increasingly complex security environment – both in the neighbourhood and beyond. And for that reason, the tone and tenor of the Statement was not surprising. The purpose of the Statement was also one of signalling – both to allies and partners as well as to those more challenging relationships. Given the recent public criticism of New Zealand as the weaker link in the FVEYS, it was not surprising to see such robust messaging to Canberra, Washington DC and London. From the domestic perspective, it also seeks to provide a clearer articulation of the role of NZDF within the domestic policy setting by stating that NZDF will play a larger role in New Zealand’s security and that the NZDF provides value to “Community, Nation, and World.” This is an interesting and potentially loaded development – the linking of NZDF to nation-building in effect – with implications for how New Zealanders understand and perceive civil-military relations. Also, the focus by Prime Minister Ardern and the Government on “values” and a values based foreign...
policy” is echoed here in the reference to NZDF’s value to “Community, Nation, and World.” It would be useful to see this articulate further though.

**What do you think the Statement has right?**

**Powles:** I’d like to start by suggesting that there is a real reputational risk that the Statement becomes empty rhetoric whilst also acknowledging that it is a living document. So while the Statement provides a more coherent and explicit assessment on a more complex strategic environment, how “right” the Statement gets it will ultimately be revealed and reflected when the capabilities review is undertaken later this year. What I was very pleased to see was the prioritising of climate change, not least because the 2016 Defence White Paper failed to mention it, but also because there is a clear linking to the Pacific Reset. Elevating the ability of the NZDF to operate in the Pacific to the same level as New Zealand’s territories, the Southern Ocean and Antarctica is a clear reflection of the Pacific Reset as well as an acknowledgement of the complex disruptors in the region from climate to crime. How this plays out will be critical and should begin with an evaluation of the Mutual Assistance Programme and its benefit to both Pacific partners and New Zealand.

**What do you think could be improved upon?**

**Powles:** Aside from the complex disruptors both cited and inferred in the Pacific – the three ‘Cs’ of climate, crime and China – and a section on how the convergence of complex cross-cutting disruptors could test local governance and state fragility – the Statement frames the Pacific in a very conventional narrative as either the source or transit point of threats. It would have been useful to acknowledge the oft over-looked dynamics shaping the Pacific at the regional and sub-regional levels including the robust identity-based agenda which is driving Pacific diplomacy. How New Zealand engages with these dynamics will be critical to the success of the Pacific Reset.

**Is there anything you would add to the Statement?**

**Powles:** There is no mention of the New Zealand Government’s commitments to the women, peace and security agenda despite public claims by the Defence Minister that New Zealand leads in this space. The New Zealand Government cannot rely on New Zealand being the first country to give women the vote as the benchmark for New Zealand’s progressiveness. In the defence and security space, political will is insufficient without a budget attached to operationalise it. This is an area which will hopefully be addressed in the capabilities review.

**What do you find of most interest in this new Statement?**

**Prinsen:** I am coming at this Statement from a Development Studies angle and the first matter of interest is the emphasis on “strong international relationships” and an “international rules-based order”. Next, I am stoked with the mention of “wellbeing” in the same breath as “security” when considering our Pacific neighbours and explicit concerns around climate change. This bodes well for international development, because it places Defence on a path to more multilateral cooperation. However, I am puzzled to then read in much of the remainder of the text that New Zealand Defence also seeks close alignment with the UK, the...
US and Australia – three countries that have to varying degrees chosen for unilateralism, protectionism and climate change denial. I wonder how our Defence will position itself when its partners move to pursue their national interests at the expense of what Defence prioritises elsewhere as the “wellbeing of our Pacific neighbours”.

**What do you think the Statement has right?**

**Prinsen:** Again, from an international development perspective this Statement’s focus on multilateralism is almost necessarily a principled support for the world’s politically and economically less powerful nations, including many of our Pacific neighbours. Moreover, I find hope in the Statement’s strategic assessment that open societies with strong state capabilities such as New Zealand have common interests with societies with weaker state capabilities; both are disproportionately affected by global disruptors. This assessment is likely to see us persist in understanding our long-term strategic interests are in reducing international inequalities, rather than in pursuing short-term national gains at the expense of smaller or weaker countries. (This becomes increasingly important as some of our Five Eyes partners now strategize that “the hard punch of military power is often delivered inside the kid glove of humanitarian relief” – UK Chief of Naval Staff on 22 July 2016.)

**What do you think could be improved upon?**

**Prinsen:** I believe the Statement takes a couple of analytical shortcuts. First, the repeated and unqualified support for “the maintenance of this order” [italics added] may lead Defence to uphold any status quo. As the Statement acknowledges the “accelerating gap between the very wealthy and the working poor” as a cause for instability within the Global North, it would be wise to acknowledge the same growing inequalities also triggers many of the international disruptors. Those inequalities drive, for example, the “staggering statistic” on migration. Surely, New Zealand Defence cannot simply support the maintenance of that order. Second, the inequalities within several countries in the Global South lead to “internal instability” – more than the alleged “transnational criminal organisations”. In the next decade, several Pacific states face calls for secession or more autonomy (Bougainville, New Caledonia, Federated States of Micronesia). Will New Zealand Defence always support the status quo?

**Is there anything you would add to the Statement?**

**Prinsen:** Yes, while I believe this Statement shows courageous thinking about the role of the military in New Zealand’s contributions to international development, I find the Statement could do with more reflection on the operational and strategic limitations of military engagement with international development. First and foremost, I think it would be important to add an analysis of the importance of keeping the public and political space in humanitarian deployments, well, civilian. If the military were to take a leading role in disaster response or peacekeeping operations, then the door to the militarisation of the civilian space both internationally and in the affected countries is opened. This is a no-win for the military and an all-loss for development. This door is visualised on page 9; why does the Statement have a photograph of Defence personnel teaching kids dental hygiene?