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Alister McIntosh’s ‘best’ diplomat

Ken Ross argues that Paddy Costello was never a Soviet agent, as often alleged, but was in fact one of New Zealand’s most brilliant foreign service officials.

‘in war and peace, he [Costello] rendered New Zealand valuable service. Whether he also served another master will remain a mystery. His intellectual brilliance has not been surpassed among his colleagues then or since’ (Malcolm Templeton, 1989)

In 1945 and 1950 British security officials (MI5) argued that Paddy Costello, then a New Zealand diplomat, was a security risk. When MI5’s Costello file became public in April this year, it laid bare the cut-and-thrust between MI5 and Alister McIntosh, the head of New Zealand’s Department of External Affairs, over Costello’s security rating.

Costello’s and McIntosh’s correspondence displays fleet-footed insight, repartee, wit and wisdom — more so than in any of the other letters McIntosh has given us in his papers at the Alexander Turnbull Library. Perhaps these exchanges do not have the historical importance of those made public in Ian McGibbon’s Undiplomatic Dialogue: Letters Between Carl Berendsen & Alister McIntosh 1943–1952 (1993) and Unofficial Channels: Letters Between Alister McIntosh and Foss Shanahan, George Laking and Frank Corner 1946–1966 (1999), but they show Costello was a shining diplomatic star for McIntosh.

The ‘Paddy’ left by McIntosh at the Turnbull is found in more places than the Costello folder in the McIntosh Papers. He confided to numerous others his enjoyment of having Costello in his team — ‘the most brilliant diplomatic officer we have’, he told Jean McKenzie in 1949.2 The correspondence between McIntosh and McKenzie, the head of New Zealand’s legation throughout Costello’s Paris posting, from October 1950 until 30 September 1954, is particularly illuminating on Costello.3

The McIntosh–Costello and McIntosh–McKenzie correspondences are my prime source for the argument made in this article. Drawing on them enables a shrewder rebuttal than has been made till now to the contention that Costello was a Soviet operative while a New Zealand diplomat. The odds that he was are substantially lengthened by this material and, as MI5’s material now public fails to nail Costello when a New Zealand diplomat, it seems a dusty file somewhere in John Le Carré’s Moscow Centre is the only possibility to clinch that Costello did fool McIntosh.

Yet because of MI5’s concerns Costello was to be the single biggest personnel headache McIntosh handled in his 23 years at the head of New Zealand’s diplomatic service. Despite MI5’s strictures, McIntosh always contended that the British had misread Costello. McIntosh’s correspondence at the Turnbull, when supplemented with the 29 McIntosh interviews the Turnbull holds, helps us better understand his confidence in Costello.4

Insightful observations

The insightful observers of Costello have been Ian McGibbon, with his entry in the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography,5 and Malcolm Templeton, in three short contributions.6 External Affairs Review, April 1964, contains a one-page obituary of Costello.

Ken Ross was an analyst with the External Assessments Bureau, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet from 1976 until 2012. He has been a research associate at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London and the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Canberra. He is writing a book evaluating New Zealand and Australian prime ministers’ engagement in global diplomacy since 1945.

Paddy Costello was Alister McIntosh’s best-ever diplomat. Costello’s intellect was too original and sceptical to be an agent for any other power than New Zealand. A communist when a student at Cambridge, his subsequent four years fighting had matured him ahead of becoming a New Zealand diplomat in 1944. Costello’s misfortune from the perspective of Britain’s MI5 security organisation was that he fell in love with and married a tough-minded British communist. McIntosh read Costello accurately and got him to work brilliantly, but had to let him go: while Peter Fraser had confidence in McIntosh on Costello, his successor as prime minister, Sidney Holland, did not.

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tello; of which two paragraphs, contributed by ‘a member of the Department’, give the rare quality of insight that only McIntosh could have scribbled down.

In a considered perspective of the espionage world, published in the New Zealand Herald in August 1981, Sir William Gilbert chided then Prime Minister Rob Muldoon for his comment that Costello may have been a Soviet spy. Gilbert adeptly puts his finger on the ‘wilderness of mirrors’ created by zealots in Western security agencies, which gave the likes of the Daily Express’ Chapman Pincher licence to contend, in his 1981 book Treachery is Their Trade, that not only Costello but also Roger Hollis, MI5’s chief from 1956 to 1965, were Soviet agents. In fact, Gilbert knew Hollis well — he had been his mentor when Gilbert was establishing the New Zealand Security Service — and Gilbert and Costello had fought the war together when on General Freyberg’s team in 1943, likely meeting again in Wellington in 1950 and later, in 1954 and 1955, when Gilbert was working in the New Zealand High Commission in London. Gilbert described Costello as ‘swashbuckling’.

In Tomorrow Comes the Song: a Life of Peter Fraser (2000), which they dedicate to Alister McIntosh, Michael King and Michael Bassett state on page 261 that Costello was ‘confirmed as, a Russian spy’ without explaining, let alone sourcing, their conclusion. In The Sixth Man: the extraordinary life of Paddy Costello (2007) James McNeish is an outsider looking through glass darkly at the diplomatic and espionage worlds. Official papers released to him by the New Zealand foreign ministry (in 2005) and the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (in 2007), enable him to walk us through, in his chapter ‘The Passport affair’, the fact that Jean McKenzie issued two Soviet spies, the Cohen couple, New Zealand passports under the names of Peter and Helen Kroger. At least New Zealand officialdom was prepared to quash publicly the presumption that Costello had done so.

**Unfounded contention**

McNeish does not get the full import of that material given him. Just as he fails to put to bed Chapman Pincher’s 1984 story of Costello’s ‘New Zealand friend’ who, in the mid-1960s, ‘was still an active secret Communist and MI5 was able to prevent his appointment to a very important position where he could have wielded damaging influence’.9 In a recent issue of this journal, I have shown that contention to be unfounded.9 It is a spurious story spun by MI5 zealots that they derailed Alister McIntosh’s ex-Pincher.11

In Beyond the Battlefield: New Zealand and its Allies 1939–45 (2009), Gerald Hensley gives a harder assessment of the possibility that Costello was a Soviet agent, invoking Christopher Andrew, Cambridge academic and MI5’s official historian.12 Andrew’s evidence for Costello being a spy is that the KGB gave Costello a code name (‘Long’) and that he issued the Cohen couple their Kroger passports.13 Hensley considers ‘a conclusive verdict must await the possibility of more information’.14 Aware of the Mitrokhin Archive material Andrew relies on, McGibbon is of a similar mind — ‘confirmation of such claims must await scrutiny of records presumably still held in Moscow’.15

**Moscow mission**

Costello had a good war as one of Freyberg’s intelligence team, which also included Geoffrey Cox and Dan Davin. Costello, an intellectual ‘General’, mixed easily with war-time top brass. In December 1943 the Dominion, Wellington’s morning paper, carried a story of Costello joking in Russian with a quartet of Soviet generals, with Lieutenant-General Freyberg present.

In April 1944 Costello, now aged 32, was recruited by McIntosh to set up and serve at the New Zealand Legation in Moscow. A month later, when he had his first meeting with Prime Minister Peter Fraser in London, Costello is reputed to have said, ‘I am afraid I am a bit left-wing, Sir’ with Fraser responding ‘Oh well, it won’t hurt us to have one or two Communists in Moscow’. Fraser made his call ‘green-lighting’ Costello for Moscow.

Fraser was on firm ground. McIntosh had consulted Freyberg and Brigadiers Kippenberger and Stevens as well as Geoffrey Cox on Costello’s suitability for the Moscow assignment.16 (Stevens provided the formal clearance for Costello.) Cox had informed McIntosh, when turning down McIntosh’s invitation to undertake the Moscow assignment, that Costello was suitable. Freyberg’s high regard for Costello was common knowledge to the general’s team at that time — Costello was Freyberg’s favourite among those close to him.

Nonetheless, soon after Costello arrived in Moscow in July 1944 the British Foreign Office, prompted by MI5, informed their ambassador in Moscow that MI5 regarded Costello as being a security concern (his wife and her brother were British Communist Party members). But none of the three British ambassadors in Moscow during Costello’s six years there found it necessary to report any security concerns about Costello, nor to place any restriction on Costello’s frequent access to their embassy. In fact, Costello was not under MI5 surveillance in Moscow — the only surveillance was by McIntosh and, of course, the Soviet authorities.17

Far from keeping a wary eye on him, the British Embassy in Moscow saw Costello as one of the elite among Western diplomats there — his insights were top currency. Costello’s extensive diplomatic reporting from Moscow became the most-valued New Zealand ‘coining’ for McIntosh and Fraser in their dealings with the Americans, British, Canadians and Australians as the Five Eyes ‘club’ was coming together.18

McIntosh was vigilant — undoubtedly a prudent approach after the British attempt to derail Costello. Between April 1947 and February 1950 he had the observations of Alan Watt, a close friend and Canberra’s man in Moscow. Watt, who had much to do with Costello, described him as untrained in the ways and responsibilities of governments, with something of the academic’s scorn regarding the need for strict security measures, always ready to argue with anyone about anything, often for the fun of the thing.19

Sir David Kelly, the third British ambassador in Moscow during Costello’s time there, also threw cold water on Costello being a security risk — he reported highly of him, having engaged him extensively for Costello’s final three years in Moscow.20
In early 1950 New Zealand’s recently elected National Party government closed the Moscow Legation. McIntosh was dispirited as the legation by then was ‘beginning to pay a useful dividend’ — high praise coming from him.\(^{21}\) When the legation shut its doors, Costello’s future was unclear. McIntosh required him, without his family, to travel to Wellington, a place he had never been to, to discuss his future in McIntosh’s plans. Costello reached Wellington in late July 1950.

**Paris posting**

On 19 September 1950, McIntosh, then in London, informed Jean McKenzie that Costello was to be posted to the Paris legation: he noted ‘Paddy is very browned off at being kept in New Zealand for two months not knowing what the hell is going to happen’.\(^{22}\)

After Moscow, Paris was to be humdrum for Costello. But, in any case, by the time he arrived he appreciated that his days as a New Zealand diplomat were limited. When MI5 found that Costello was heading for Paris that was too much for them given their concerns about him: MI5 ensured that Sidney Holland, the new prime minister, was told so. McIntosh’s own possible vulnerability to MI5 stricture following an ‘appalling episode’ in Singapore in January 1950 complicated his position vis-à-vis standing strong for Costello.\(^{23}\)

In sending him to Paris, McIntosh reached an understanding with Costello that he should move on from External Affairs as his future was too uncertain — McIntosh could not employ him in Wellington because he was not engaged in 1944 as a permanent employee of the New Zealand Public Service. Costello had informed McIntosh, on 24 December 1949, when it became evident the new government would close the Moscow post.

I am thinking of resigning and returning to academic life, preferably at Cambridge. I really am more interested in books than diplomacy, and I can imagine nothing better than a job which gave the opportunity to get down to some research work. I have been able to do some here, but I suspect that at Wellington or at any other post one would be too busy with current business.\(^{24}\)

McIntosh sensed enough ambivalence on the part of the new prime minister not to rush the matter. Moreover, quite unexpectedly, Holland had personally enjoyed ‘hanging about’ with Costello in Paris in January 1951, and in January 1952, when Costello interpreted for him. Then, immediately after attending the Queen’s coronation, Holland and his wife embarked on a month-long tour on the continent and Costello spent all of July 1953 touring with them. The Paris legation’s annual report noted that Costello was too extraordinary, his brilliant mind was too swift to drift and that for various reasons I would have to remind him of the arrangement that he would have to get another job eventually and that he should therefore increase the tempo of his search. He wrote back very decently and explained what he had been doing and agreed to push along. He offered to get out immediately but I said that there was no need for anything precipitate but if things got difficult I would let him know.\(^{26}\)

There is no evidence once Costello was in Paris that the British acted on the threat made in late 1950 to cut-off classified contact with the New Zealand Legation. The claim that Costello issued passports to the Cohens has been conclusively disproved — they were in fact issued by McKenzie herself. And indeed there is no certainty that MI5 had Costello under surveillance in Paris, even though another New Zealand Legation diplomat was under British surveillance and was observed meeting a Russian official of concern to London.\(^{27}\)

As the saga ended, with Costello’s 30 September 1954 resignation, McIntosh wrote to McKenzie that ‘The Paddy situation has been more difficult to handle than you may have imagined, especially as there is really not a scrap of reason why it should be handled the way it has been.’\(^{28}\)

Costello was too extraordinary, his brilliant mind was too swift to crawl at the pace skilful spies score their trophies. He had too much lust for a life full of scholarly and diplomatic action to have fitted spying in as well. The irony of MI5’s pursuit of Costello is that by having him forced out of diplomatic life he got what he most wanted — to be a scholar.

**Final resolution**

But the situation could not continue indefinitely. In September 1953 McIntosh informed R.M. Campbell, a long-time confidant, that he had written to Paddy and told him that we could not allow the situation to drift and that for various reasons I would have to remind him of the arrangement that he would have to get another job eventually and that he should therefore increase the tempo of his search. He wrote back very decently and explained what he

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**NOTES**


2. Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL), MS-Papers-6759-313, folio 22. This letter, dated 22 December 1949, is the final paper in that folder. MS-Papers-6759-314 has their correspondence when Costello was at the legation in Paris, and the exchanges between McKenzie and McIntosh while the Costellos remained in Paris for the following eleven months until they moved to Britain, where he became professor of Slavonic studies at Victoria University of Manchester. Even then, Costello was being mentioned in their letters, which continued until McKenzie’s death in Christchurch in July 1964.


4. ATL, MS-Papers-11090 has the transcripts of the five McIntosh interviews the Turnbull Library commissioned Professor Fred Wood and Mary Boyd to do in late 1975 and July 1976. In 1978, McIntosh did 24 interviews with Michael King that the Turnbull subsequently purchased. Those transcripts are in MS-Papers-2096-01, MS-Papers-2096-02, and 77-107-12 to 77-107-14 The last interview was three days prior to McIntosh’s death on 30 November 1978.


6. Templeton, pp.20–4, Templeton, ‘Mac’s Team — J.V Wilson and Paddy Costello’, in Brian Lynch (ed), *Celebrating New Zealand’s Emergence: A Tribute to Sir George Laking and Frank Corner* (Wellington, 2005); and Templeton’s review of James McNeish’s *The Sixth Man, the extraordinary life of Paddy Costel-


10. ATL, MS-Papers-6759–303 to 306 has Lochore’s many registrations of disgruntlement.

11. ATL, MS-Papers-8752-206 has Lochore’s report.


16. Kippenberger’s Infantry Brigadier (London, 1949) and Denis McLean, Howard Kippenberger: dauntless spirit (Auckland, 2008) each have numerous mentions of the Costello–Kippenberger dynamics during the three years they served at close quarters.

17. In October 1950, when MI5 informed the Foreign Office that Costello was about to appear in Paris as a New Zealand diplomat, it became evident that the British in Moscow had not had Costello under surveillance.

18. Templeton, Top Hats, pp.42–60, for Costello’s diplomatic reporting from Moscow.


20. ATL, MS-Papers-11322-05.

21. ATL, MS-Papers-6759-351. McIntosh made the comment, in a letter to Major-General ‘Bill’ Stevens, the number two at New Zealand House, London, on 13 December 1949 — the day Sidney Holland became prime minister.

22. ATL, MS-Papers-6759-314.


24. ATL, MS-Papers-6759-260.

25. Ibid., Costello to McIntosh, letter dated 27 Aug 1953.


27. ATL, MS-Papers-6759-384 and MS-Papers-6759-314. Doug Zohrab was still being ‘shaken about’ by the New Zealand Police three years later, in their final days of handling the vetting of public servants.

28. ATL, MS-Papers-6759-314, McIntosh’s 11 Oct 1954 letter. Appointees under the 1943 External Affairs Act, which enabled non-civil servants to hold diplomatic positions, McKenzie and Costello were never permanent employees of the Department of External Affairs. Thus, neither had an automatic entry right to the New Zealand Public Service. This explains why neither ever appeared in any annual edition of List of persons employed in the Public Service on the 31st day of March.

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Rita Ricketts reviews MI5’s evolving case against Costello, as revealed in his recently released file in the British archives.

In their prolonged scrutiny of Paddy Costello, MI5 had scant evidence to go on. As a child, he was something of a paragon: an altar boy and a swot. His parents were conservative, patriotic and devout Roman Catholics. But they were of Irish immigrant descent, and his mother was famous for her renditions of patriotic songs. Tom Larkin, now aged 99, still remembers all the verses of a revolutionary song of Costello’s mother, taught to him by Costello. Living in crowded conditions over his father’s grocery shop for the first ten years of his life, in working class Auckland, must have encouraged Costello’s anti-establishment leanings and left him with a chip on the shoulder, or so MI5 maintained.1

More prescient would be Costello’s student years: first at Auckland College then Cambridge. In Auckland, however, during what Malcolm McKinnon terms ‘the broken decade’, Costello had kept his head down. Gaining a double First in Greek and Latin, he was awarded a travelling scholarship at Trinity College, Cambridge. New Zealand’s police commissioner reported later, in July 1934, that while in Auckland Costello was a ‘decent young man with no communist tendencies’. But he had ‘friends who had communist leanings’, and may have ‘become a sympathizer’. That ‘he had renounced Roman Catholicism’ was also thought to be significant.3 Where better to find a new, communist, ‘faith’ than in the very left-inclined Cambridge of the 1930s?

Costello almost certainly took part in the peace demonstration in November 1933. In 1934, MI5 discovered, he contributed £5 to the communist paper Daily Worker and was associating with communists. In a letter on file, Griff Maclaurin, a member of the Communist Party, writes to his friend Costello that he will contribute a further 30 shillings to funds; he adds: ‘I’m sorry I cannot send more’.4 Here indeed was something to go on. Costello had certainly known other, famous, communists while at Cambridge, such as John Cornford and James Klugmann. But by the time they had taken over the Cambridge cell, Costello had gone down.

When the Russians were recruiting the infamous ‘Cambridge Five’, Costello was married and out of earshot.5 But his wife Bella (‘Bil’) started to attract MI5’s attention. The fifth of eight children born to Russian-Jewish immigrants from the Ukraine, she had followed her married brother to Cambridge to help care for his twins while he was at the university. Looking for part-time work, she ran across Maclaurin, who offered her a job in his bookshop. MI5 would see it as axiomatic that Bil, whose family were leftish, would fall in with a communist: ‘her brothers and sisters had much in common with the Kroger [Cohen] spies’.6 Paddy met Bil in his friend’s bookshop and soon after, in 1935, they married. Costello took up a lectureship at University Col-

Friends knew Paddy Costello as funny, noisy, irreverent, argumentative, acerbic, occasionally appallingly drunk and a latter day minstre. But Costello, a forensic Irish smartarse, who would not tug his forelock to his British elders and betters, raised the Establishment’s hackles. Even more damning, he could speak Russian and understood the Russian psyche. So, of course, he had to be a Soviet agent in MI5’s eyes. Whether or not Costello was a spy is still debated. Although the recently released MI5 files will provide ammunition for his detractors, they offer little more substantive proof.
lege, Exeter just as the Spanish Civil War started. When Maclaurin wrote that he was going to fight, Costello rushed to London to see him off, but was forbidden by Bil to follow suit. Maclaurin was killed fighting in defence of Madrid and John Cornford, who was friendly with Bil, died a few weeks later. After these tragedies, Bil was active in the Exeter Communist Party, becoming a full member in August 1943, MI5 noted.

**Secret trip**

After spending the 1937 summer raising funds for the Republican cause, Costello made a secret trip to India, taking £500 in cash as a gift from the British Communist Party to the Indian Communist Party. In February 1940, the police reported that ‘various members of the Communist Party’ lodged from time to time with the Costello; they included Bil’s brother Jack Lerner, who had sold the *Daily Worker* in London in 1934 and was raising funds in Exeter. The same report contained the news that ‘Desmond Patrick Costello — Communists’ had resigned from the Labour Party, having refused to sign a document agreeing to abide by its principles.

Had Costello turned communist? When Costello was dismissed from his Exeter post, in October 1940, for ‘communist activities’, MI5 was convinced. But the evidence was purely circumstantial. One of Costello’s students, Hubert Fryth, imprisoned for offences against the Official Secrets Act, had been a frequent visitor at the Costello home. With the invasion of Britain imminent, the case against Fryth must have sounded deadly serious. In fact, it was trivial. The French government had banned the circulation of the *Daily Worker* among British troops. Fryth, receiving this information from his brother, a naval officer, passed it to the paper. It was hardly surprising if Fryth went to his tutor for help, but counter-intelligence officials assumed that Costello was recruiting for the Russian intelligence service. Exeter’s chief constable, incorrectly naming him as Benjamin Costello, reported that ‘information on his activities had now reached members of the Local War Emergency Committee.’ Costello, meanwhile, had joined the army. The official British Communist Party line had been to ‘decry the war and urge resistance’. Costello, in contrast, ‘had joined up, proved himself in the field and been commissioned’ before official attitudes to communism changed when Russia entered the war.

**Infantile habit**

Costello *might* be a lapsed communist, but Bil stayed loyal to the creed and permission was granted to open her correspondence. On file is her 1941 order to the communist central propaganda department in London for 50 posters, ‘Strike now in the West’. In 1941 she was protesting at her expulsion from the party, ‘on the grounds of political unreliability’. By July 1943 she was back in the fold. Predictably, her application to be an aeronautical inspector in Bristol was rejected on security grounds. Costello, meanwhile, appears to have slipped off MI5’s radar, save to mention that he had been promoted and appointed as an intelligence officer to General Freyberg. When the news came, in September 1944, that he was to be offered the post of second secretary in the new New Zealand Legation in Moscow, MI5 officials were aghast. A flurry of letters came from MI5’s Roger Hollis, and much, of course, was made of Costello’s dismissal from Exeter. However, British High Commissioner Sir Harry Batterbee was more sanguine:

Costello had an excellent record as a most efficient and reliable officer… who proved during his war service that he could be relied upon… [his] leftish tendencies… an infantile habit that he had grown out of… were not a bar to his selection.

Batterbee’s good account cut no ice with MI5. The Exeter incident was revealed to Secretary of External Affairs Alister McIntosh. But with new post to staff, Costello’s fluent Russian and Freyberg’s recommendation more than offset MI5’s aspersions. Neither McIntosh nor Freyberg would have supported Costello had they entertained even the faintest suspicion that he had betrayed his country. Period. Their certainty must have rubbed off on Prime Minister Peter Fraser. When interviewed for the job, Costello informed him that he was ‘a bit left-wing’; to which Fraser replied: ‘we can do with one or two communists in Moscow’.

Under pressure from the British, McIntosh insisted that Costello go alone to Moscow; though McIntosh relented after the birth of the next Costello child, ignoring British strictures. Counter-intelligence grew more vigilant. Costello now had access to confidential information, and he and his wife had the opportunity to associate with leaders of the Soviet Communist Party. However, by the time the legation closed in 1950, good reports of Costello’s work had justified McIntosh’s faith. Costello continued to air ‘pink’ views out of sheer esprit de contradiction long after he lost faith in Soviet communism as a politi-
cal system. I suspect too that he suffered at some stage at the hands of some Blimpish English superior, and was always expecting to be high-hat-
ted by us; or perhaps he was ostraclized when he first came here?

Makins concluded that both Costellos had chips on their shoulders — in Bil's case be-
cause of her 'East End Jew-
ish–Ukrainian origins'. Yet 'both became increasingly mellow in Moscow' and he 'never
gave me any reason to doubt his reliability'.

Black marks

Called back to Wellington for a debriefing, Costello impressed 'all those concerned… with [his] grasp of detail and his objectiv-
ity in reporting', McIntosh reported to Hollis. But his drunken-
ness at a reunion in Auckland resulted in a night in 'the cooler'.
M15 was not surprised — in the words of Roger Hollis, 'in vino
veritas'. Since this episode and Costello's posting to Paris co-
incided with the unraveling of the Burgess/Maclean deception,
M15 were even more mistrustful of suspected communists in
government (especially diplomatic) service; equally they may
have jumped at a chance to divert attention away from their own
security lapses. McIntosh told Hollis of his worry that police
over-zealousness might warn people off Costello, in which case
his usefulness to New Zealand 'would be greatly diminished if
not nullified'. No action should be taken, he maintained, until
Costello had accounted for himself. None the worse for his es-
capade, Costello apologised to the prime minister and was sent
on his way to Paris. He and his head of mission there, Jean Mc-
Kenzie, were kindred spirits; neither came from establishment
backgrounds. She, like McIntosh, would try to face down the
mounting criticism that Costello's presence 'inhibited the free
exchange of information between governments'. The ensuing
battle of wills continued until March 1952, when Prime Minis-
ter Sidney Holland consented to Costello's removal.

Even so, McIntosh granted Costello a protracted period of
notice, giving him time to finish a book and successfully find
an academic appointment. Taking up the chair of Russian stud-
ies at Manchester University in May 1955, Costello was now
'safely away from any confidential government business', though
not from the Russians. The family, often acting as interpreters,
were made telephone contact with Paddy.19 M15 decided that Costel-
lo had long cultivated Russians, noting, for example, that in
North Africa in March 1943 he
had conducted a group of visiting TASS representatives in
the NZ divisional area… This was followed, a year later, by
a visit from a Russian military delegation to the NZ divi-
sion on the River Sangro. Costello made contact with one
member who he recognized from the previous TASS visit.…

It was at this time that Costello began to study Russian.
But Costello was able to make 'contact' because he already spoke
Russian, having taught himself in Greece in 1934.20 M15 of-
ficials were tilting at windmills.

M15 now changed tack; had Costello 'influenced' his diplo-
matic colleagues? Douglas and Ruth Lake, for example, had had to
leave New Zealand's diplomatic service; it was also thought
that Ruth and Costello had had an affair de coeur. Douglas
Zohrab was targeted since he had been in Paris with Costello
at the time that false passports were issued to Helen and Pe-
ter Kroger, subsequently found to be Russian spies. This was a
dead end: the head of mission had issued the passports in good
faith, and Costello was away from Paris at the time.21 However,
a Foreign and Commonwealth Office official, K.M. Wilford,
who had known Costello in Moscow, 'thought' both Costello
and Zohrab were spies. Since Zohrab was still in service, as New
Zealand's consul-general at the European Office of the United
Nations in Geneva, secret information might be compromised.22
M15, with Wellington's help, cast the net wider. Costello was a
referee in a job application of Margaret Milner, the divorced wife
of Ian Milner, who had been implicated by Australia's Ministry
of External Relations as having passed information to the Rus-
ian intelligence service.23 Jim Bertram, 'known as a Sinophile
with pro-Communist leanings in the past', was also identified.

Murky world

M15 officials could hardly believe their luck when an interview with Costello's old Auckland friend David Murdoch, 'on whom there were unconfirmed traces of communist activity in the early 1940s', was unearthed. In one of his letters to Murdoch in 1934, Costello, then in Greece, had described his habit of going to
a café where he could read Pravda. On one occasion, a waiter
surreptitiously showed him his Greek Communist Party badge.
Costello reciprocated, showing his British Communist Party
badge. On this 'evidence', rather than the fact that Costello had
a deep intellectual interest in Russian literature, M15 concluded that he was a communist and a spy.

Although, R.C. Symonds wrote, Costello is clearly the more
important of the two, they now had 'conclusive' evidence that
his wife was also a KGB agent. Applications for two death certifi-
cates, dated 11 December 1960, containing the names of chil-
dren who died twenty years before, had been discovered. They
were signed by a B. Green, whose given address was an old one
of the Costellos. Handwriting experts certified that the applica-
tion was in Bil's hand.24 But was not it all rather pat? Hand-
writing analysis would never stand up in court and KGB agents
were known to be in the habit of obtaining the death certificates of children for their own nefarious purposes. Bil, who Russian
intelligence service agents must have known was under British
surveillance, was a perfect scapegoat and cover.

M15, convinced now of the Costellos' guilt, arranged for
them to be tainted; they were given the code names Dog Rose
(Paddy) and Couch Grass (Bil). Their correspondence and
phone calls were monitored. Their letters, on file, are as boring as the transcripts of their phone calls, but arrangements for dealing with a civic delegation from Leningrad excited interest. Obser-
vation sheets on file detailed Costello's movements in London,
where it was believed his Russian intelligence service contacts
were made. They read something like a B movie script.25 The
hapless agents lose their man, they incorrectly identify supposed
KGB agents, one of whom, but they are not sure who, Costello meets again on the station platform, having previously met him in the pub. Costello speaks with him, but they travel in different carriages. If the meeting was an innocent one of friends, then why did they travel back in separate carriages? A further tail (in November 1963) followed Costello, again in London, as he went to catch a train home. Having deposited his belongings in left luggage, he caught a bus to Collet’s bookshop. He emerged with a book under his arm and met a known agent, incorrectly identified, with a parcel under his arm. Costello is then seen, from a distance, walking off with this parcel. MI5 thought it had clinched the case. But could it be that the parcel under Costello’s arm was merely the book he had purchased at Collets?

**Muddled accounts**

Muddled though their accounts were, the agents’ vigilance was praised. Costello’s ‘clandestine’ meetings with alleged ‘KGB officers’ were reported to the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service’s Brigadier Bill Gilbert. Gilbert jumped to the conclusion that given the manner of the meetings, Costello must be a spy. Furthermore, Symonds reported from London that he thought he had identified Costello’s ‘controller’: a publishing agent named Yermakov, who would be good camouflage for someone with Costello’s academic interests. Gilbert, still sore at McIntosh’s past support for Costello, was gleeful. Symonds reported:

> this case is likely to be a sensation in London when it is made public… Gilbert is of course very excited … I think he already has visions of McIntosh’s scalp hanging on his belt’. MI5 did not, however, bring down McIntosh, and Paddy died of a heart attack on 4 February 1964. The case against Bil must have been judged inconsequential, since, after Paddy’s death, the files were closed.

But was there, as Symonds had believed, ‘more to this case than has ever come out’? Costello, after all, was just one character, causality, in an epic story of a small country seeking to define its own interests in a way that reflected its principles and values, rather than the inherited prejudices of others. New Zealand had already dared, on some occasions, one of which featured Costello, to oppose both Britain and America. Perhaps MI5’s pursuit of Costello was Schadenfreude? And it was far easier to pick him off than McIntosh and his posse. This is surely a story with more to run?

**NOTES**

4. Maclaurin had been at Auckland Grammar School with Costello and they had left home for Cambridge at the same time; they also travelled together later for a while.
5. Nonetheless, there is, later in the file, an unsubstantiated claim by Anthony Blunt that Costello was recruited.
8. See Doc 28a, Feb 1940, letters on file, 30 Apr 1940, and Exeter Police special reports, 22 Feb, 29 Apr 1940.
13. Doc 64a, Batterbee to Machtig, 6 Jan 1945.
17. Doc 87a, McIntosh to Hollis, 4 Dec 1950, and reply dated 31 Jan 1951 (Doc 93A).
18. Doc 1221, 6 Feb 1952, for an example of the tone used by MI5.
20. MI5’s senior liaison officer, Wellington, 14 Apr 1959; evidence given by David Murdoch to NZ Intelligence in 1945, the report of which the SLO was given to read in the 1960s.
22. Doc 183x, 24 Jun 1963; Doc 272a, 27 Jun 1963; see also 241a, 23 May 1963, 492, 7 Jun 1963. It may be significant that Wilford, at the time, was private secretary to the lord privy seal (Edward Heath): see Doc 183y, 19 Apr 1961. When interviewed in 1984, Heath was against granting concessions to New Zealand, which he thought was jeopardising the United Kingdom’s bid to join the European Common Market. If New Zealand had to be taken down a peg or two, what better than a spy scandal to raise doubts about its soundness?
23. Doc 181a, 22 Sep 1960, FCO.
27. Doc 252c, Symonds to Gilbert, 5 Jun 1963; Docs 271a, 21 Jun 1963, and 301a, 10 Sep 1963; Doc 316A, 30 Oct 1963. A prominent NZ Sovietologist (who prefers not to be named) suggested to me that Gilbert was the wrong man for the job of NZSIS first head — a career army officer who modelled everything on the British way and on MI5 in particular.
29. In resolving a border issue at the 1947 Paris Peace Conference, Costello had acted in favour of the Czechs, who had supported the Allies in war, instead of the Hungarians, who had been enemies, to some British and American discomfort. See also T.G. Larkin (ed), *New Zealand’s External Relations* (Wellington, 1962), where there are references throughout to an independent foreign policy and to incidences of New Zealand disagreeing with Britain and America. A more recent example was the banning of US warships that could be nuclear armed from its waters.
**PADDY COSTELLO**

## The MI5 verdict

Ian McGibbon outlines what Paddy Costello’s recently opened MI5 file indicates about why British counter-espionage concluded that he was a Soviet agent.

Whatever the truth about Paddy Costello’s allegiance, one fact is known: towards the end of his life, MI5 concluded that he was a Soviet agent. There had been suspicions for nearly three decades, of course, but after taking his professorship in Manchester Costello fell off MI5’s radar, at least for a time. The focus returned to him in the early 1960s, though not for the commonly supposed reason of his alleged involvement in the Kroger affair — the issue of New Zealand passports to Peter and Helen Kroger (who were in fact Soviet spies Maurice and Leontina Cohen) by the New Zealand Legation in Paris in 1954 when Costello was on the staff; in possession of perfectly forged documents, the Krogers needed no illicit assistance in obtaining the passports. Nothing on Costello’s recently released MI5 file indicates any suspicion falling on him when this was revealed in 1961.

That Costello came under renewed MI5 scrutiny was directly attributable to his wife Bella (Bil). Long known to have been a communist earlier in her life, she was identified as having ordered several children’s death certificates in 1960. Acquisition of such documents was known to be a KGB ploy to create false identity documents or passports. She did so under the assumed name B. Green; the address she gave was one she and her husband had had twenty years before in Exeter. This was an amateurish mistake for an agent, but it only became significant because of the alertness and good memory of an MI5 official. Reviewing the application some years later, he recognised the former address of the Costellos when they were under suspicion of being communist agents. A classic example of the value of institutional memory, his discovery convinced MI5 that Bella Costello was a Soviet agent. When apprised of it, the head of New Zealand’s Security Intelligence Service, Brigadier Bill Gilbert, agreed that her action was ‘pretty conclusive evidence’ against her.

After this MI5 took another look at Paddy Costello. Although no longer having access to government documents, he nevertheless held a position that could be useful to the Soviets, or so counter-espionage officials thought. As an agent of influence, he could encourage students to go to the Soviet Union on cultural exchanges or visits, where they might be suborned or recruited. Both he and his wife were placed under close observation. Transcripts of telephone calls made by Bella Costello are to be found on the file, invariably innocuous. When her husband visited London, MI5 agents tailed him.

During one of these visits, Paddy Costello’s actions were deemed by MI5 to be incriminating. ‘He was seen during the Whitsun holiday [1 June 1963] in contact with an identified K.G.B. officer [V.S. Ermakov] and the manner of their meeting made it certain that this was a clandestine R.V. [rendezvous],’ a head office official advised MI5’s man in the British high commission in Wellington in June 1963. In November MI5 advised the British Foreign Office that their investigations have led us to the discovery that both Costello and his wife are agents of the Russian Intelligence Service. The information is completely firm. We do not know when they were recruited by the R.I.S., but this must have been some time ago, possibly when they were in Moscow.

On 10 December another MI5 official referred ‘to our opinion that he and his wife were engaged in what might be described as illegal support work’. Because Paddy Costello had no access to classified information, he thought it ‘unlikely… that the case would ever result in a prosecution’.

Convinced that both Costellos were agents, MI5 officials began a retrospective examination of what information Paddy might have had access to while a New Zealand diplomat. Examination of diplomatic associates of his, in particular Doug Zohrab, continued even after Paddy Costello’s death on 23 February 1964 effectively closed the file on him. There is no evidence on the file that any action was taken against Bella, or of continuing surveillance of her.

Final resolution of the question of whether Paddy Costello was a Soviet agent still depends on revelation of records presumably lodged in the former KGB archives in Moscow. However, the so-called Mitrokhin Archive, material from these records smuggled out of Russia in the late 1990s, does provide a hint of corroboration of MI5 concerns, with Paddy Costello described as one of the KGB’s leading agents in Paris operating under the codename ‘Long’ while he was in New Zealand’s legation there.

## Notes

1. Papers on file KV2/4330 in the MI5 records in the UK National Archives, London.
2. R.C. Symonds, Note for file, 23 May 1963, UKNA, KV2/4331.
3. Ibid., Symonds to SLO New Zealand, 7 Jun 1963.
4. Ibid., Symonds to J.E.D. Street, 7 Nov 1963.
5. Ibid., D.W. Bloomfield, Note for file, 10 Dec 1963.
A modern French Revolution

Emma Nichols discusses the implications of Emmanuel Macron’s ascent to power in France.

When Emmanuel Macron founded his own independent political movement in April 2016, few rated his chances of winning his bid for the French presidency. One year on, President Macron’s party boasts an absolute majority in the National Assembly, the French lower house, albeit following a legislative election with the lowest voter participation rate since 1958.

How did this rising star of French politics manage it? What does he hope to achieve on the domestic, European and international scenes, and will he manage to do so while keeping French voters on side? Was President Macron’s victory based on merit, circumstance or both?

Emmanuel Macron certainly campaigned hard to win the French presidency, but it cannot be denied that his road to the Élysée Palace was made smoother by the weakness of his political opposition. The political centre, normally fought over by the centre-left Socialist Party and centre-right The Republicans party, was left wide open for Macron to occupy. This desert in the political centre was the result of the unexpected results of the primaries held to choose presidential nominees for both major parties. Unlike American voters, France has not been accustomed to party primary processes — this was only the second time the Republicans chose their candidate through a primary process, and the first for the Socialist Party.

Both primaries gave French voters the chance to express their dissatisfaction with the status quo: their choices of presidential candidates displayed an appetite for change. On the right, expected contenders Alain Juppé and former President Nicolas Sarkozy were eliminated in favour of a relative outsider, former Prime Minister François Fillon, who campaigned on a platform of traditional conservative and Catholic values. Fillon, while initially predicted to win the presidency in a landslide, succumbed to the fallout from a scandal over his wife’s work, or suspected lack thereof, while employed as his parliamentary assistant. Fillon broke his promise to voters and did not resign once put under judicial investigation, causing an exodus of his campaign staff and voters alike.

On the left, expected contenders former Prime Minister Manuel Valls and Arnaud Montebourg lost out to the more radical Benoît Hamon, a candidate who endorsed legalising marijuana and taxing automated systems to help protect workers’ jobs. This unexpected choice of Fillon and Hamon as candidates left the political centre open for Emmanuel Macron to emerge as a compromise candidate.

Crucial context

Crucial to the context of President Macron’s victory was, of course, the rise of Marine Le Pen. While Le Pen broke the record for the highest number of votes any National Front candidate has ever obtained in an election (10.6 million), she remained so unpalatable to the majority of French voters that they backed Emmanuel Macron to prevent her winning the presidency. The so-called ‘Republican Front’, the uniting of left and right-wing voters to block the far right, held out once again. Since the election, the National Front has been quiet until the surprise resignation of party heavyweight Florian Philippot — the party appears divided over how to proceed following Marine Le Pen’s defeat.

Lastly, one cannot look back at the French presidential election without mentioning the rise of left-wing firebrand Jean-
Luc Mélenchon. A long-time politician, he managed to modernise and capture a large chunk of the youth vote, maximising the opportunities of televised debates to showcase his fiery oratory skill. He campaigned on an anti-liberalisation platform, including re-negotiating France’s adherence to a number of EU treaties.1 His surprise last-minute burst in popularity saw him polling neck and neck with former favourite François Fillon. His party, Unsubmissive France (La France Insoumise), entered the French lower house with seventeen seats, and has since hit the ground running as a vocal member of the political opposition, leading protests against labour reform. A recent poll placed Mélenchon as the second most popular French politician, much higher than Marine Le Pen.2 His particular brand of far-left populism will make him one to watch in future French elections.

Despite the political centre being deserted, and his run-off opponent being Marine Le Pen, Emmanuel Macron deserves a great deal of credit for his successful campaign. He took risks, visiting a Whirlpool factory that was suffering job losses in the north of France, Marine Le Pen’s stronghold, and spending an estimated 90 minutes talking with locals about globalisation. He managed to distance himself from former President Hollande’s low approval ratings despite serving in his Cabinet. His unique and optimistic tone painted him as a candidate for change, while other candidates predominantly criticised the status quo. The fact that his success came despite campaigning on such politically controversial topics as giving more powers to the European Union, reforming workers’ rights and reducing state spending is a testament to his ability to win over voters. President Macron won his election not only through circumstance but also by demonstrating a great deal of political skill.

**Unprecedented renewal**

President Macron’s political party, The Republic on the Move (La République en Marche), holds an absolute majority of 309 out of 577 seats in the National Assembly. If one includes the ‘constructive opposition’, his majority rises to an impressive 66 per cent of seats. His party’s members come from all walks of life — indeed Macron held an open process calling for applicants to run in all constituencies. He promised and delivered on gender parity, and on having candidates with strong civil society and private sector experience. Macron’s fresh new breed of politicians, as well as the retirement of a number of older career politicians this year, mean that the French lower house now boasts 75 per cent new members, many of whom have never held public office before — a democratic revolution. In electing Macron’s members of parliament, French voters chose to change the system from within, rather than overthrow it.

On 23 September, an electoral college, rather than the general public, voted on half the seats in the French Senate. The conservative The Republicans party won a majority. This should not slow down President Macron’s reforms too much: in the French system the National Assembly, the lower house, wields more power than the Senate.

What does President Macron hope to achieve? Since taking office, he has moved swiftly on a number of priority policy fronts. On the domestic agenda, his most controversial priority was labour reform — not just what but how to achieve it. President Macron’s parliamentary majority granted him the power to implement the reforms by executive order, bypassing what would have been no doubt a heated, and much longer, parliamentary debate. The debate was taken to the streets, where hundreds of thousands of citizens have marched in protest. Nevertheless, the crowds have not been as large as they could have been — France’s largest union, the CFDT, did not officially take part. This may be due to the time taken by Macron and Prime Minister Édouard Philippe to consult with unions...
prior to instituting the reforms. Economic and fiscal reforms are also underway, including changes to rationalise the tax system and significant budget cuts to bring France’s fiscal deficit in line with European Union guidelines. This issue came to a head in July when a dispute over military spending flared up publicly and led to the resignation of the chief of armed forces.

Key focus
In Europe, reinvigorating the Franco-German relationship was a key focus for Macron. His first state visit was to Berlin, and he hosted a joint Cabinet meeting between his and Chancellor Merkel’s ministers in Paris. In fact, Macron was so focused on Germany during his campaign that he was accused of neglecting the rest of the European Union member states. His Cabinet line-up includes a renamed minister for Europe and foreign affairs, and under him a minister charged specifically with European affairs.

President Macron has publicly advocated for a more integrated Europe with a new finance minister portfolio and dedicated budget, and has been working to convince Germany of the merits of this idea. Another priority is harmonisation social protection: greater alignment of social policies would close loopholes and reduce incentives to undercut companies in countries like France, where social security payments make labour more expensive. President Macron outlined his ‘roadmap for Europe’ in a bold speech just two days after the German federal elections in September.

Combatting terrorism is a very high priority for any French president, and Macron is no exception: during his mandate the French military will likely remain engaged in Iraq, Syria and the Sahel. Macron has also attempted to channel his citizens’ security concern, along with their dissatisfaction with the European Union, into a by-line ‘A Europe that protects’ — a way of selling the benefits of the European Union in security terms. He has also used ‘A Europe that protects’ in the trade context to fight dumping of cheaper products onto the European market, and for getting fair free trade deals from the European Union’s trading partners.

On the international stage, France’s youngest head of state since Napoleon has been careful to craft a presidential image, inviting Russian President Putin to visit Versailles and US President Donald Trump to be the guest of honour at France’s 14 July national day military parade. His international engagements are full of symbolism — his recent speech on the future of Europe was made in Greece on the Pnyx, a hill where ancient Athenians held their democratic assemblies. President Macron has also taken up France’s climate change banner, standing firm on the Paris climate agreement in the face of a US withdrawal. Fundamentally, Macron has not changed French foreign policy much, but he has been carrying it out in a different, carefully scripted style.

Can Macron succeed and in doing so win a second term? He is hoping that frontloading his more significant reforms will yield results and thus raise his opinion ratings prior to the 2022 presidential election. For now, he appears content to fight the tough battles and accept the popularity trade off, safe in his strong parliamentary majority.

Three tightropes
In his pathway to the 2022 presidential election President Macron will need to walk three challenging tightropes. First, he will need to calibrate his desire to be decisive with the risk of appearing authoritarian: while the French appreciate strong leaders, they do not take kindly to kings. Second, Macron will need to balance fiscal austerity against the need to manage change incrementally. If he moves too fast, he may appear too right wing and alienate a core part of his centre-left electoral base. Go too slow and he runs the risk of losing his right-wing supporters, as well as the confidence of Angela Merkel.

Lastly, President Macron has an inexperienced political party to manage, and hold loyal. His situation is unique — he came to power without an established political party, and unbothered to intra-party politics. Now, he must continue to ensure the loyalty of his 309 Assembly members, as well as the constructive opposition from other parties who have chosen to lend him their votes. These are tightropes of Macron’s own making, born out of his desire to be neither left nor right on the political spectrum. The political centre carries a constant curse: in trying to please both sides, one disappoints all.

On the whole, President Macron appears to be delivering on his agenda. Time will tell if his efforts will be enough to convince his EU partners, and future French voters, to share his vision.

NOTES
1. Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s campaign platform outlined here: avenircommun.fr/carte-programme/refonderlunioneuropeenne/.
2. Survey conducted by French polling company Odoxa, 13–14 September 2017 (www.odoxa.fr/sondage/macron-1ere-rentree-tant-president-pire-celle-dhollande?).

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New Zealand’s strategic context: one or many scenarios?

Stephen Hoadley sketches the six strategic scenarios that are likely to challenge New Zealand in the coming years.

The title of this analysis suggests that New Zealand operates within one strategic context. If there were one consensual view that all relevant decision-makers share, government could base its security policies and New Zealand Defence Force planning and operations on a unified perspective. Applying the whole of government and NZ Inc approach, then this unity of aims and means would be a valid way to maximise efficiency, economy and effectiveness of policies.

But strategic analysts and international relations scholars, particularly those who call themselves realists or constructivists, assert that there are as many strategic views as there are significant political-military actors. An inventory of those actors would start with the 193 state-members of the UN General Assembly. It should include also significant non-UN-member governments such as the Republic of China on Taiwan, the Palestinian Authority, the Autonomous Kurdish Government in Iraq, the Islamic State in Syria, the Polisario government in Western Sahara and the Turkey-backed government of Northern Cyprus. Then add to these a number of secessionist movements in Spain, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Afghanistan, India, Burma, southern Thailand, the Philippines and eastern Indonesia, many of them armed. The inventory should include also the affiliates of al-Qaeda and ISIS in Libya, Nigeria, Somalia and Afghanistan, such as the Taliban.

Each of these political-military entities has a strategic view, that is, a set of aims and a collection of human, physical, and military assets dedicated to pursuing those aims. To investigate the strategies of each and how they converge or diverge from others is the job of specialists. In this article I propose to single out five principal actors and summarise their strategic views, then suggest how we in this part of the world can adapt to them so as best to achieve our strategic aims or, in other words, how the government can pursue New Zealand’s national interests.

Mainstream view

The mainstream strategic view with which we are most familiar is that which the like-minded Western governments have pursued since the Second World War. It was initiated by the internationalist administration of President Harry Truman. During this period the United States has been the principal shaper of a strategy of voluntary engagement with allies and partners around the world to resist rogue states threatening to destabilise the current balance of power and redraw national boundaries. It is a strategy to strengthen international institutions, free up trade, encourage global communication and encourage governments to co-operate to curb disease, poverty, climate change, crime and terrorism. The outcome of this strategy, regrettable pockets of conflict and natural disaster aside, is a continued rise in human welfare throughout the world.

But this strategy is under stress at the moment. An alternative view of strategy is emerging in the White House. President Donald Trump during his election campaign queried the fundamentals of US global leadership which, arguably, have underpinned a half century of relative peace and prosperity. He asserted he would ‘make America great again’ by turning inwards, building walls, blocking imports and immigrants, qualifying US support for NATO, the United Nations and the WTO and withdrawing from the Paris climate change accord.

If Trump’s actions were to match his electoral campaign rhetoric, the familiar alliances and webs of mutual trust and co-operation with the United States could be weakened. Trump would risk moving the United States from a benign hegemon providing the public good of geopolitical stability to a neo-isolationist state abandoning the field to rivals, some not so benign.

European syndrome

A variation of this syndrome has appeared among voters, and some political parties, in the United Kingdom and Europe. The ‘leave’ majority in the 2016 referendum obliges Prime Minister Theresa May to take Britain out of the European Union. Brexit will not only deprive the European Union of one-third of its...
wealth and military capacity but also encourage other EU governments to either exit or resist the EU leadership in Brussels. Poland, Hungary and Greece are increasingly sceptical, as are significant portions of European electorates, mobilised by the anti-EU, anti-immigration Netherlands Freedom Party, French National Front and Austrian Freedom Party and counterparts in other countries. The European Union, the exemplar of peace, prosperity, democratic governance and soft power, may become the European dis-Union. Europe may again regress to a small space at the edge of Eurasia occupied by 28 governments, each pursuing its own interests with diminishing concern for the common good in, for example, management of debt, refugees or counter-terrorism. Political, economic, and military manoeuvring for advantage, as happened in the 1930s, may follow, and we all know the dire consequences that followed at the end of the 1930s in Europe and East Asia.

A fourth strategic view drives Russia’s security policies. President Vladimir Putin presides over a failing economy and an authoritarian, corrupt and brittle regime. He compensates for weakness by inventing enemies abroad, mainly the United States and Germany, then rallying his people to defend Mother Russia. His goal is to make Russia great again. Putin’s strategy of defence is to mount military, covert and cyber offensives in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. He has subverted and colonised bits of Georgia, including south Ossetia, and Ukraine, including Crimea and the Donbas, and put Lithuania under pressure.

Furthermore, Putin is setting up a rival economic bloc, the Eurasian Economic Union, into which he has drawn Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. Looking southwards, Russia is now the principal player in Syria, displacing the United States, and increasingly influential in Iran and Turkey. A key tactic is to weaken the Western alliance, particularly NATO. As the United States and Europe hesitate, riven by volatile publics and the rise of nationalist populists, Putin can pick off bits of territory on his borders and build his influence farther afield as the leader of a resurgent Russian empire.

Chinese view

The fifth strategic view is held by China’s leaders. President Xi Jinping presides over a country rising assertively from the ‘century of humiliation’ when European and Japanese imperialists dominated much of China. China has not only the world’s largest economy and rapidly modernising armed forces but also an ambitious plan to build transportation and communication infrastructure to the west and south to connect China all the way to Europe. This is called the New Silk Road or the One Belt One Road initiative, and is backed by banks set up by, or financed by, China’s ample

President Xi Jinping of China
foreign reserves, earned by selling the West its inexpensive manufactured products.

This initiative would be welcomed by New Zealanders if it were not for China’s human rights violations, harsh rule in Xinjiang and Tibet and illegal island-building in the South China Sea. China is already a key influence on North Korea, Laos, Cambodia and Pakistan, a leader of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and a proponent of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership that is likely to replace the faltering Trans-Pacific Partnership that New Zealand has ratified. Journalists and academics are already speculating that if the United States under President Trump turns inward and relinquishes global leadership by default, China might emerge as the next global leader. I believe that most New Zealanders would find a Chinese hegemony in East Asia, displacing US hegemony, to be a disturbing prospect even if achieved peacefully. But the potential for armed conflict between China and its neighbours may rise as China’s assertiveness grows.

Hobbesian scenario

A sixth strategic scenario is harder to summarise because it has no leader and no centre. This is a scenario of the absence of world leadership, institutions or order, a modern manifestation of the state of nature portrayed by Thomas Hobbes in which the ‘law of tooth and claw’ reigns and life is ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short’. It is a syndrome of more than 200 governments and armed political movements pursuing their own strategic aims by a variety of methods, some violent. It looks like the 1930s, when the United States under President Trump turns inward and relinquishes global leadership by default, China might emerge as the next global leader. I believe that most New Zealanders would find a Chinese hegemony in East Asia, displacing US hegemony, to be a disturbing prospect even if achieved peacefully. But the potential for armed conflict between China and its neighbours may rise as China’s assertiveness grows.

Korean challenge

Even in distant New Zealand we cannot ignore the challenge presented by an unrestrained North Korea. The missile tests and rhetoric of July and August obliged the world to assess the consequences for us of North Korea’s disturbing nuclear weapons and missile achievements.

Is Kim Jong Un mad to threaten the United States? I believe he is rational, but his rationality is based on strategic and political assumptions very different to ours. His fundamental belief is that South Korea and the United States, backed by Japan, are poised to invade North Korea and depose Kim’s Stalinist regime. Perpetuating that regime and his own rule of it is his highest priority. His strategy is to threaten nuclear destruction of any attacker. By exaggerating external threats and displaying his own military
retaliatory might, he can rally his suppressed and undernourished people. This is a tactic practiced by leaders throughout history, most recently, and successfully, by Vladimir Putin, and in a milder form by President Trump. Few analysts believe that Kim will attack the United States or South Korea, for he and his generals know that would end their regime and their lives, never mind the economic and human costs. Thus the Western response must be unified and critical but not provocative, avoiding any excuse for rash action by either side.

In my view, the approach of the US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson seems to be about right: be firm but hold out the possibility of negotiation if Pyongyang stops missile tests. China’s leaders have tacitly taken a similar stance. In contrast, President Trump’s fiery utterances have been ‘unhelpful’, to quote leaders as diverse as Prime Minister Bill English and German Chancellor Angela Merkel. The same could be said of President Kim.

**Possible outcomes**

To sum up so far, I have sketched six geo-strategic outlooks and associated scenarios, each with implications for New Zealand. Which scenario will prevail? Or will all of them play out simultaneously, in an unpredictable combination, as I believe they will? And will the consequences be bad for New Zealand?

The first scenario, the President Truman scenario, is most favourable to New Zealand, and we should support its continuation. It is characterised by benign hegemonic stability underpinned by the United States, to which like-minded governments, and their armed forces, may contribute voluntarily and according to their capacity, interests and will. The analogy to markets is instructive. Markets are voluntary transactions that raise the welfare of each participant and the aggregate welfare of all, as economic philosophers Adam Smith and David Ricardo asserted in the late 1700s, laying the intellectual foundation of the prevailing free market ideology of the present era. But markets require some governance to provide uniform currency, weights and measures, infrastructure and protection from fraudsters, thieves and invaders.

Hegemonic stability is similar. The United States, its allies and US-supported international organisations facilitate convergence of rules and norms, and also security, within which framework governments, and producers and traders, can go about their legitimate business, a consequence of which is rising human welfare. Small states such as New Zealand have a place and a voice. That is why New Zealand should support the President Truman scenario and be wary of the others as detrimental to the progress that humankind has made in the past half-century.

But I hasten to reassure readers: at present a world of violent great power rivalry and anarchy has not yet emerged. The fundamentals of the post-Cold War international system are still intact. Despite President Trump’s extravagant rhetoric, his administration has not yet dismantled US alliances and commitments or closed US borders. At the working level, outside the White House, it is mostly US business as usual. Trump’s generals — Mattis, Kelly and McMaster — and Secretary of State Tillerson appear ready to ignore their volatile commander-in-chief and to pursue familiar security policies, including those that include New Zealand as a valued partner.

**Relative stability**

Despite Brexit and Boris Johnson, Britain remains a staunch supporter of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, as do France, Germany and other European governments, and no other EU member has made a move to leave… so far. Europeans’ political and economic discontent has not yet fractured the Atlantic Alliance. Russian influence may have reached its limit as NATO deploys to Poland and Lithuania and economic sanctions bite into the military’s budget. South China Sea islet-poaching and A2/AD missile and warship deployments aside, China’s energies appear to be channeled into economic initiatives in south and central Asia rather than directly challenging the United States’ longstanding presence in the Western Pacific, much less the US global status. Governments on China’s periphery are supporting a US presence in their regions to counterbalance their giant neighbour. Local despots are irritating, the Islamic State is threatening and terrorists are a world-wide scourge, but none has changed the geopolitical map or toppled a significant government.

Now, given six strategic outlooks and associated scenarios, one benign and five challenging, how should the government of New Zealand respond? It is beyond New Zealand’s capacity to determine which of these scenarios will prevail or comprehensively to meet their challenges. But New Zealand leaders, working with likeminded governments and international institutions, can anticipate and perhaps shape the contours of each, and mitigate their consequences, at least in the southern Pacific region. The government of New Zealand and the defence forces and intelligence agencies can be aware early of the emergence of these scenarios, follow their manifestations and respond intelligently to the threats — and the opportunities — that each presents.

Beyond this prudent posture of preparedness, the government of New Zealand should support the current international order, with its benign webs of consultation, co-operation, trade and human interaction safeguarded by international institutions, laws, and norms. While prolonging the status quo is hardly visionary, the alternatives sketched in the other five scenarios are clearly worse for New Zealanders and should be watched sceptically and where possible, resisted and mitigated.
Overseeing New Zealand’s modern military operations

Rhys Ball and Wil Hoverd discuss the implications for democracy and national security of the deployment of special operations forces.

‘The integrity of the Defence Forces is too important not to investigate this fully and properly…’ (Barry Coates MP, 8 August 2017)¹

New Zealand has had an active special operations force since 1956. It has been deployed to places such as Malaya, Borneo, East Timor and, more recently, Afghanistan. This article outlines how New Zealand’s special operations forces might continue to contribute to the interests of the state by engaging in a broader discussion about this country’s national security and the relationship between democracy and the military in light of the recent ‘Hit and Run’ allegations.

Politics and New Zealand special forces have been indirect and direct bedfellows in one form or another since the creation of this military force over 60 years ago. New Zealand’s special forces have progressively expanded their capabilities, influence and strategic footprint thanks in large part to operationally successful campaigns and a higher public profile (think Corporal Willie Apiata VC). And when the former New Zealand Prime Minister John Key publicly describes the New Zealand Special Air Service (NZSAS) as ‘the Ferrari of the New Zealand military’, as he did in 2016, we can perhaps deduce the perceived political value that such a force generates in a wider national security sense.²

But in early April 2017, Prime Minister Bill English gave a press conference³ where he responded to a call for an official inquiry into the allegations of war crimes made against NZSAS operations in 2010 as they were documented in the book Hit & Run⁴ written by investigative journalists Nicky Hager and Jon Stephenson.⁴ English considered that, after receiving a ‘detailed briefing’ from Chief of Defence Force Lieutenant-General Tim Keating, including official reports and classified video footage, ‘there was no basis for launching an inquiry’. In response to this announce-

ment, Hager wrote that the decision was ‘the result of military pressure on the government: the tail wagging the dog’ and was ‘not good for the country’. Hager added:

Bill English is an experienced minister who knows the difference between being shown selective information by an interested party, as he has been by the defence force, and having an independent inquiry. This does not appear [to be] a rational decision based on evidence; it is helping the military bureaucracy to avoid having to front up.⁵

In this article, our purpose is not to argue that one or other party is correct or that another is lying; rather it is our intention to focus upon the broader issues this debate has raised in thinking about democratic governance, public accountability and the role of the military now and in the future. This most recent set of allegations perhaps points to the fragility of New Zealand’s democratic processes around military deployment and action. Specifically, we review our constitutional structure for deployment and show that the executive decision-making power to deploy and act militarily continues to rest in the hands of only a few people. Finally we suggest that as New Zealand’s military deployments move away from a paradigm of mandated United Nations deployments towards ever-increasing participation with traditional partners, it might be a useful exercise to consider if there is a possible role for an independent oversight mechanism to make our deployment procedures and activities more robust.

**Constitutional accountability**

Militaries deploy to conflict as an extension of the executive

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² New Zealand’s special operations forces continue to make a valuable contribution to this country’s national security. However, in light of the recent ‘Hit and Run’ allegations, and the prime minister’s response, there is a possible fragility of New Zealand’s democratic processes around military deployment. A review of New Zealand’s constitutional structure for making such commitments indicates that the executive power to act militarily continues to rest in the hands of only a few people. In the circumstances, it might be an opportune moment to consider a possible role for an independent oversight mechanism to make procedures more robust and transparent.
power of a nation. New Zealand has no formal constitution; consequently, executive authority tends to be derived from a series of acts of Parliament and other documents. When it comes to defence, the relevant document is the Defence Act 1990, which explains that the governor-general, on behalf of the sovereign, is responsible for continuing to raise and maintain armed forces, either in New Zealand or elsewhere for the following purposes:

(a) the defence of New Zealand, and of any area for the defence of which New Zealand is responsible under any Act;
(b) the protection of the interests of New Zealand, whether in New Zealand or elsewhere;
(c) the contribution of forces under collective security treaties, agreements, or arrangements. In Section 6 the governor-general is deemed to be the commander-in-chief of New Zealand, and shall have such powers and may exercise and discharge such duties and obligations relating to any armed forces raised and maintained under Section 5 as pertain to the office of Commander-in-Chief. In Section 7 the general responsibility of the minister of defence is outlined ‘in relation to the defence of New Zealand, where the Minister shall have the power of control of the New Zealand Defence Force, which shall be exercised through the Chief of Defence Force’. The role of the chief of defence force is set out in Section 8.3:

The Chief of Defence Force shall — (a) command the Navy through the Chief of Navy, the Army through the Chief of Army, and the Air Force through the Chief of Air Force: and (b) command any joint force either directly through the joint force commander or through the Chief of any Service. Under the Defence Act 1990, the responsibility for deployment of the NZDF is handed to the three offices of governor-general, minister of defence and chief of defence force. However, what is not exactly clear in the Act are the roles and responsibilities of Parliament and the prime minister when it comes to military deployment and action, which means we need to look to historical precedent.

The decision to establish the NZSAS was made at, or following, the Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Conference in London in February 1955, in response to a British request that New Zealand send an infantry battalion to Malaya. Prime Minister Sidney Holland refused, saying that New Zealand’s Korean War commitments limited his ability to do so; instead, he counter-offered with the SAS. Interestingly, the NZSAS did not exist at this time. Holland’s decision to create the SAS was ultimately successful — militarily, politically and diplomatically — and laid an essential foundation for subsequent post-Second World War service by New Zealand regular army units. For much of this time, decisions were considered and made behind closed doors; genuine democratic input was next to non-existent and certainly there was no broader mechanism to consider and debate defence and foreign policy commitments and contributions.

**Flexible tool**

Scholars Eliot Cohen and Colin Gray both posit that special operations forces offer a strategically flexible foreign policy tool that is much less costly, both financially and politically, than a much larger deployment. Such an ‘economy of force’ has been consistently demonstrated by the NZSAS — certainly this was the case during the top secret CLARET operations in Borneo in 1965. CLARET operations were not only risky from a military perspective but also politically sensitive. Neither the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth nor Malaysia were technically at war with Indonesia and it was important that they not appear to escalate the conflict. The then Prime Minister Keith Holyoake was initially reluctant to allow the NZSAS to operate inside Indonesian territory. Officials convinced him, however, that the strategic value of deployment would far outweigh the ‘risk of political embarrassment, [both] domestic and international’, if any soldiers were discovered across the border.

The SAS operations in Borneo thus became a politically safer instrument of choice, at a time when — it must be noted — international coalition operations could not be observed or viewed by external commentators and domestic populations in the same way that they can be now in the 21st century. Would the public of today be so tolerant and accepting of NZSAS operations that clearly breached international law? CLARET cross-border operations were just that: illegal incursions into sovereign territory. And would New Zealand governments today be willing to allow similar activity to take place, without any national authority coming from Wellington? The answer is ‘possibly’, if we are to consider more recent activity.

In a more contemporary setting, when it comes to deploying the NZDF abroad, there remains no requirement for parliamentary consent, but it has been common practice for a parliamentary debate to occur before or after the announcement of any deployment. This occurred, for example, in advance of UN-mandated deployments to the Persian Gulf in 1990, Bosnia–Herzegovina 1994, East Timor 1999 and the Solomon Islands 2003, as well as non-mandated deployments to Afghanistan 2001 and Iraq 1998, 2003 and 2014. This practice is similar to that of Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, where there is no legal requirement to have parliamentary consent to deploy abroad, but in the United Kingdom it has become a convention to seek parliamentary consent for such purposes.

All of New Zealand’s military deployments have been announced by the prime minister of the time, generally with the support of Cabinet and the minister of defence. So what exactly is the role of the prime minister in this process? The New Zealand Cabinet Manual section 2.11 states that ‘The Prime Minister customarily has overall ministerial responsibility for national security and intelligence matters, and may also hold other portfolios.’ In addition, the manual in section 2.3 states that

The Prime Minister is the head of the government. The functions and powers of the Prime Minister have evolved over time. There is no statutory provision that constitutes the office of Prime Minister or defines its role. Nevertheless, the prime minister’s role when it comes to national security extends to oversight of the minister of defence, thereby theoretically adding a fourth office to the decision-making layers around military deployments and action.

**Potential weakness**

Terry Johanson has recently contested the robustness of having the prime minister making decisions about national security because this person is not elected for expertise in this area. For Johanson, the prime minister represents a potential weakness in New Zealand’s national security system for two reasons. First, they lack the relevant security expertise and, second, the executive power of the office of the prime minister can override the democratic processes of the government’s national security mechanisms. In light of the Hit & Run controversy, we would add a third and fourth
Concern. Third, when it comes to determining the veracity of the *Hit & Run* allegations the prime minister acts as oversight for the NZDF, as well as retaining the executive power for its deployment; fourth, the only oversight of the prime minister’s judgment is coming from investigative journalists, who likely do not have a full picture of the truth, and neither do they present a formal independent democratic oversight mechanism.

What happens when the powers of executive offices are brought into question? By only having four offices involved in the decision-making process our system could possibly be democratically fragile. Let us turn to Hager and Stephenson and how they portray the democratic decision-making process that they reconstructed around the NZSAS operations in question. To paraphrase, they portray the August 2010 decision-making process as follows: they note that the NZSAS operation fell within their rules of engagement but that its scale required that the then Chief of Defence Force Jerry Mateparae and then Minister of Defence Wayne Mapp should be briefed; they then in turn both felt that responsibility for authorising such an operation should go to Prime Minister John Key. Together they rang Key from Afghanistan and in response Key gave a ‘greenlight’ to the specific action to go ahead.13 Before we shift to analyse this process, some caveats are required. While we do not know how accurate this reconstruction might be, we can likely infer that the prime minister’s decision was made very quickly, and his ‘greenlight’ was almost completely reliant on the expertise and leadership of the CDF. That executive office responsible for giving permission for the operation in 2010 is essentially the same office that has investigated possible wrongdoing in 2017.

A consequence of *Hit & Run* is that a picture of democratic defence decision-making emerges that contains potential conflicts of interest. And this process becomes fragile when the integrity of the actors and offices are brought into question. This is especially so when we see how close the 2010 personalities are to those doing the investigating in 2017. The closeness means that there is potential for a perceived conflict of interest. Consequently, in 2017 English and the CDF, Tim Keating, are vulnerable to having trust, integrity and confidence in their decisions further challenged.

### Integrity questioned

What Hager and Stephenson have achieved is to question the integrity of our democratic processes and effectively to lessen public trust and confidence in these offices. And if they are correct, they are right to do so. However, because we cannot discern complete truth in this case, today, the New Zealand public have to trust the word of the prime minister and the CDF when they state that there is no need for an inquiry. Our current democratic processes mean that we have to trust, rather than be fully certain, that these experts are acting independently and with full knowledge of the facts. Hager and Stephenson and the executive’s responses to their allegations have resulted in a ‘he said, she said’ situation. And herein lies the democratic fragility: the New Zealand public has been asked to trust the NZDF, trust their decision-making and trust that they are indeed accountable to the prime minister; currently, we have to be content that there has been no misconduct, because the alternative is unthinkable.

When we look elsewhere, this question presents itself both locally and beyond, and both militarily and within a wider national debate. In May 2017, former prime minister and constitutional lawyer Sir Geoffrey Palmer also criticised the robustness of New Zealand’s democratic processes because the government has increasingly failed to provide transparency or consult with the public around its decision-making and has actively withheld information. All of which, he argues effectively, lessens trust in political offices and alienates the public.15 More specifically, we see that allegations into the alleged cover-up of war crimes in Afghanistan are not unique to New Zealand, with three Canadian cases being investigated and in 2010 Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper being accused of suspending Parliament rather than releasing testimony and documents related to the investigations.15 Similarly, in July 2017 the United Kingdom opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn has called for an independent inquiry to examine ‘whether the probe into alleged SAS “war crimes” had been deliberately impeded by the Ministry of Defence’. In these cases, public scrutiny, trust and confidence in the existing oversight and accountability mechanisms have also been brought into question.

Ultimately, if we decide to continue to maintain our support for a rules-based international system, and demonstrate our willingness to be a responsible global citizen, we need an agile military, but we also need to have trust and confidence that the executive’s defence decisions are robust and act in the best interests of New Zealanders. A national security system which allows for both outcomes is essential. This is especially so when we move into an era where we might not always act within UN mandates, but rather are deploying at the request of our allies. As such, part of this shift also means we need to actively consider whether we need stronger domestic democratic mechanisms to ensure that New Zealand’s overseas military actions and deployments are just and responsible.

### Oversight question

Do we need better oversight mechanisms? Colin Gray suggests that from a geopolitical standpoint, small-scale is extremely important as it ‘reduces the radar signature of involvement’.17 This small-scale can offer deniability, but more importantly it can equate to a reduced public interest. It can be argued that in the past this has enabled New Zealand governments to offer credible military resources to coalition partners and strategic allies with minimal domestic interest. The NZSAS created in 1955 was an example of this low key, small-scale contribution achieving certain strategic objectives. A generation later, the deployments to Afghanistan, which began in 2001, have enabled consecutive administrations to provide a credible military contribution, even if a much larger and significant domestic debate about the deployment of New Zealand troops overseas now takes place.

Beyond their economic utility, Gray also suggests that the typical circumstances of special operations, as well as their purposes, generally involve significant risk.18 Fine; from a tactical perspective, special operations are high risk because as a general rule they operate in a high risk or hostile (for example, behind enemy lines) environment. Similarly, because they are small-scale, they are unlikely to have support (such as back-up forces or transport for extraction) if they get into ‘trouble’. This presents operational risk and — especially relevant here — political risk when things go wrong. And in a globalised world, when we can see and hear much more than ever before, how we consider and manage this space is worth thinking about a little more.

The *Hit & Run* discussion prompts the question: do we need an oversight mechanism for the prime minister and the military?219 The question of independent national security oversight is
not without recent precedent in New Zealand, as it arose in the intelligence domain after it was found that in 2012, amongst a variety of allegations, the Government Communications Security Bureau was illegally spying on New Zealanders.20 In 2013, the consequences of these findings resulted in the expansion of oversight powers for the independent inspector-general of intelligence and security;21 they also led to Prime Minister John Key divesting the traditional prime ministerial responsibility for intelligence to a new ministerial portfolio,22 the restructuring of personnel structures and leaders in our intelligence sector23 and the commissioning of an independent review of intelligence and security (the Cullen–Reddy Report), which ultimately led to the recently passed Security and Intelligence Act 2017.24 When it came to considering the oversight of New Zealand’s intelligence community, the 2016 Cullen–Reddy Report found as follows:

Our central conclusion is that there should be a single, integrated and comprehensive Act of Parliament that lays out in plain English how the agencies are constituted; what their purposes are; how all their intelligence and security activities are authorised; and how they are overseen so as to protect those freedoms and liberties that are part of what we are as a nation.

The Act should state clearly that its fundamental purpose is the protection of New Zealand as a free, open and democratic society. That then becomes the guiding principle by which the activities of the agencies must be undertaken and judged.25

**Likely continuance**

At this stage, it is not clear that there is a requirement for wholesale change to the Defence Act or that a formal oversight mechanism would be regularly needed. The current system of prime ministerial and CDF oversight, which is democratically fragile and fraught with trust and conflict of interest issues because it operates on an ad hoc basis, likely will remain unchallenged for the time being; at least until the next time it is tested, as it was by *Hit & Run*.26 If such a challenge were to occur, it is likely a proper conversation about the benefits and limitations of defence oversight mechanisms would be necessary. Certainly, we cannot afford to have any individual party or parties, be they two investigative journalists or others, bring the integrity of the whole decision-making system into question because there is an absence of democratically adequate and acceptable oversight.

But neither is it reasonable to burden ourselves with unwieldy and extraneous multi-layered oversight mechanisms that would potentially paralyse the NZD; nor is it necessary to introduce wholesale constitutional changes to the Defence Act based on a single event. Such an event has potential implications at the highest level; the implications and consequences ‘ripple out’ within New Zealand and further afield. Adequate oversight protects democratic institutions, citizenry and freedoms as much as it protects the very elements of the state — like special operations forces — that we are asking to carry out these roles in our name. How this is considered needs to be very carefully discussed and resolved to the satisfaction of all parties of this democratic state. And there is no better time than the present.

**NOTES**

10. Ibid.
11. Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), Cabinet Manual (Wellington, 2017), Sec2.2.
19. Paul Buchanan, ‘An Inquiry into the Hit and Run claims is now essential. And there is an obvious person to lead it’, *Politics*, 31 Mar 2017.
21. See Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security (IGIS) website.
Adjusting to political earthquakes

Terence O’Brien provides a New Zealand view of the current geopolitical landscape.

It seems to be part of human nature that each succeeding generation imagines it exists in a world at a time of transformational change. Yet dimensions of change as they affect a country, a community or an individual often take time fully to emerge, and to comprehend.

In 2016 two events — the British decision to quit the European Union and the election of Donald Trump as US president — reinforce a present sense of indomitable change in global affairs, even though we are far from sure about all the consequences, which will be long term. There is a deluge everywhere of analysis and prediction. Both events were the result of democratic choice where voters rejected established political convention, and signalled a rise of what we now call populism.

Both events also reinforce one basic point — that international relations and, therefore, the geopolitical landscape are irrevocably conditioned by domestic factors. It is rash to generalise. But the mood in both Europe and the United States was one of grievance about inequality — not just inequality of income, although that played a part, but inequality created by entrenched influence of political elites, remote unelected bureaucrats, wealthy individuals and big corporations who were perceived to suborn politics and, indeed, democracy itself. Inequality about rights and opportunities together with feelings of powerlessness and a collapse of social trust, therefore, produced political earthquakes on either side of the Atlantic.

The slogan that the political contest in 2016 was between ‘patriotism and globalisation’ captures the grievance mood. There was resistance to the perceived deficiencies of globalisation and the liberal economic reforms first pioneered in the 1980s by Britain and the United States. On top of these, long lasting pain inflicted by the 2008 global financial crisis upon people in both countries was a contagious influence. The fact that governments bailed out the big banks and financial institutions whose profligate behaviour caused the global financial crisis fuelled grievance. The point in all of this is that wounds that produced the turbulent outcome in both places are largely self-inflicted. They serve to subtract from the reality and aspirations of modern Western governments to be leaders in the world.

The American political system seems now to have lost an ability to create broad coalitions that solve complex issues. This predates Donald Trump’s arrival in office. It was clear beforehand that money, special interest groups, sensationalist media and ideological antagonists had captured an overly rigid governmental structure despite its vaunted checks and balances, invented in another distant era. That at least is the opinion amongst serious Americans themselves; they doubt that the United States now commands the flexibility, resourcefulness and capacity to reinvent itself that it has displayed in the past, and which assured predominance on the geopolitical landscape.

Absolute US military superiority remains indisputable, but after twenty years and more of endless war in the Middle East is that sufficient on its own for global leadership, especially if moral authority is receding? That is the question which the Trump administration will decide one way or the other, although it is presently paralysed by internal strife and obsession about Russian interference. Reputable American commentators themselves rate the problems of domestic political dysfunction inside the US governmental system an appreciably greater threat to American primacy than terrorism or turmoil in the Middle East or Asia.

Seismic shift

The political earthquakes in Europe and the United States coincide, moreover, with a wider seismic shift at the centre of gravity in the world economy. A group of newly emerging economies, principally in Asia, has over the past 40 or so years grasped the opportunities provided by globalisation to record rates of economic and social progress that are historically unequalled in scale and speed. China leads the way. The goalposts on the international economic playing field are changing and, in the process, altering the global pecking order.

Progress will not necessarily be smooth. Setbacks may in the normal way occur. Important structural adjustments to China’s authoritarian government system plus the eradication of corruption will, amongst other things, condition China’s advance.

Both in Europe and the United States political earthquakes have reinforced a present sense of indomitable change in global affairs. The British decision to leave the European Union and the election of Donald Trump as US president have unleashed a deluge of analysis and prediction, but the outcome remains uncertain. Compounding the problem, these changes coincide with a wider seismic shift at the centre of gravity in the world economy. The goalposts on the international economic playing field are changing and, in the process, altering the global pecking order. Greater diversity is inevitable as the tectonic plates shift below the global economy.

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However, newly emerging powers are already demonstrating that to be modern and successful in this world does not require that a country first become Western or necessarily democratic.

Over several decades Western governments led by the United States championed the spread of liberal democracy as the ideal for national self-fulfilment and political legitimacy. It is not clear yet whether President Trump with his strident outcry of ‘America First’ actually embraces that traditional pathway of values-driven external policy; nor the principle of collective response with others to prevailing global problems of poverty, resource depletion, environmental destruction and the like.

All the signs are anyway that greater diversity is inevitable as the tectonic plates shift below the global economy. There will be different versions and definitions of capitalism, of democracy, even of corruption. There will have to be more inclusive notions about what actually constitutes political legitimacy. The West does not, and will not, have a monopoly on institutions and practices that enable countries to promote welfare of their citizens.

In combination, the 2016 political convulsions in the Atlantic world and those trend lines in the international economic space add to suspense and uncertainty. They sharply underline the vital importance of nurturing predictability and, therefore, of rules-based behaviour by powerful and non-powerful governments alike internationally if we are to navigate ahead successfully. Yet the world’s rules-based system is under pressure.

**Rules-based behaviour**

If the successful newly emergent powers are to accept the greater responsibilities as good international citizens that their status now demands, it is logical that they be entitled to equality in management of international institutions — the United Nations, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organisation and World Bank — that provide the bedrock for the international rules-based system; and which are, of course, inventions by powerful 20th century Western architects, notably the United States.

Successful newly emerging countries certainly anticipate a greater influence. Well before Trump and Brexit, US and powerful European governments have, nonetheless, proven quite reluctant to substantively relinquish and share command. EU countries are traditionally solid supporters of a rules-based international system. But their first priority in a post-Brexit future will surely be to guard against further disintegration of the European Union itself, rather than the need to reform and modernise international institutions. In Britain the first task will be negotiating its European exit and plotting a separate existence in the world. There is some silver lining in the stern resolve of the Europeans, China and others, however, to champion the 2016 Paris Conference on Climate Change agreement, a critical requirement on the geopolitical landscape.

The ‘America First’ blueprint of President Trump has resulted in American disavowal of that Paris agreement. This reflects a wider ambivalence about the rules-based international order. President Trump’s trade policy focuses particularly on the size of the American trade deficit with individual countries. It prioritises bilateral dealings to correct perceived inequalities. It envisages unilateral strengthening of America’s border defences to protect against implied unfair trading activity by others. Regional multilateral trade agreements (like the NAFTA or TPP) are to be discarded or renegotiated.

In all of this there is real danger that such a zero sum trade doctrine will undermine the WTO and its most favoured nation trade principle, which has imbued the global exchange of goods over several decades of growth in international trade. In an era where global supply chains and their negotiation are now a defining feature of world trade, it is not at all clear just how serviceable or damaging US policy aimed at eliminating US deficits with individual partners will prove.

**Exceptionalist sense**

America’s sense of exceptionalism as a country charged by destiny to change the world predates Donald Trump by a long way. The purpose of a rules-based international system for the United States has traditionally been to ensure privilege for American interests, and where that does not eventuate to stand aside from negotiation or the results of negotiation. The list of these US self-exemptions is long. Thus, for example, Washington does not formally endorse the conventions on law of the sea or defining economic and social human rights, the treaty banning nuclear weapon testing, the statute establishing the International Criminal Court, treaties banning land mines and cluster munitions, protocols against the use of torture, conventions on the rights of the child, handicapped persons, and discrimination against women and several more international agreements — all foreworn by the United States but agreed by others, including New Zealand, as the outcome of principled negotiation.

In the 20th century the world owed the United States a debt for leadership in creating a liberal international order. In the 21st century, given the structural change under way, it is difficult to imagine, however, that a viable dependable international system can endure let alone prosper on the basis of ‘exceptionalism’. That does not mean that preserving, reforming and extending the system just depends solely upon the United States. Indeed, there is now such a profusion of stakeholders and beneficiaries within the thickening web of international rules and institutions that it is a misconception to conclude that one country, no matter how powerful, will alone dictate progress.

It is, however, quite possible that the system will become less than universal if particular major powers decline to be involved in any proposed additions to, or reforms of, the system. For smaller countries, this potentially presents a difficult choice, particularly where those defecting major powers otherwise share tradition.
New Zealand conventionally strives to pursue external interests in company with other ‘like-minded’ countries. But defining ‘like-minded’ in the future could become much more problematic.

China has undeniable ‘exceptionalist’ tendencies of its own. There is no serious evidence to suggest that Beijing intends to confront or overthrow the existing system, even while it asserts a right to a greater place in the management of that system. Beijing recognises that China benefits from the established rules-based order. There is no evidence either that it seeks to usurp American claims (and the costs) of global leadership or that it seeks to change the world in its own image, but China expects respect, global influence and regional primacy.

**Parallel order**

China is meanwhile building the foundations of a ‘parallel order’, which, it contends, is intended to complement the established system — for example, with the founding of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank to complement the World Bank, with a Universal Credit Rating Group to complement Moodies and Standard and Poors, with support for the BRICS grouping of newly emergent powers to complement the G7 of major Western powers. In the political domain, it champions the Shanghai Cooperation Council, a grouping of Central Asian countries and Russia. In a process that is likely to continue, China, which is intensely realist, is stringing its bow twice — both affirming existing institutions and creating parallel structures. But it is not engaging in serious confrontation with the principle of liberal order.

China is committed to maintaining and strengthening the WTO, even while the US attachment is uncertain. In size of population, of economy and levels of accomplishment, China leads, moreover, in many fields of modern enterprise — in production of computers, semi-conductors, communications equipment, robots, solar generation and energy, electric motor vehicles and much else. Its ability to conceive and undertake costly, long-term, path-breaking projects is striking. The launch of a trillion dollar plus transport and technology infrastructure network, the so-called One Belt One Road, spanning Asia/Europe, represents a big idea of geopolitical vision unmatched in an Atlantic world. The path-breaking projects is striking. The launch of a trillion dollar plus transport and technology infrastructure network, the so-called One Belt One Road, spanning Asia/Europe, represents a big idea of geopolitical vision unmatched in an Atlantic world.

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At times of significant global structural change, larger more substantial nations with history, ambition and traditions of dominance can and do find adjustment difficult. Precisely that challenge now overlays the present geopolitical landscape as the United States and China come to terms with each other. They have not finally made up their minds whether they are pre-destined to be strategic adversaries or strategic partners.

America remains by a large measure the most powerful military power in history with its 600 military bases and installations spread around the world, and lavish spending of around $600 billion plus per year on improving its military strength. This expenditure is some four times that of China. China and Russia have, moreover, but one foreign base each. Russia’s only base is in Syria, which helps explain President Putin’s determination that Russia should play a prominent role there in the intractable conflict that endures.

**Insufficient basis**

What the present changes to international order indicate is that military superiority alone is not sufficient for leadership. New Zealand does not want, moreover, to have to choose sides in whatever rivalries may beset US–China relations. Neither is an adversary that threatens New Zealand. In the past New Zealand, as a small, modern democracy with no hard power but with a sense of international responsibility, has displayed capacity for operating successfully below the radar screens of the powerful; and as our foreign interests have appreciably widened, an ability to roll with the punches in international relations without compromising principle.

Comparatively speaking, New Zealand’s strategic invisibility and its physical remoteness, coupled with the multiple benefits of swift modern communications technology, provide 21st century geopolitical advantages for the country — but fresh challenges, in particular vigilance with others over cyber security, become imperative. Education of its people and preparation of society to address the changes afoot is a vital on-going national task.

An even-handed New Zealand approach with Beijing and Washington, if it is to be understood and respected, requires a clear balanced New Zealand understanding of the issues on the geopolitical landscape that are, or will be, at stake. Such aptitude extends well beyond the capability to pursue and conclude free trade agreements around the world. It requires a changing national security outlook as well as changing patterns of co-operation and competition.

Several hotspots on the current geopolitical landscape deserve close attention. Media headlines are full of controversy about sovereignty and navigation in the South China Sea. The sovereignty disputes are longstanding between China and certain South-east Asian nations, as well as Japan, over multiple small islands and rocks. Freedom of navigation is, however, a controversy substantially between China and the United States.

**Navigation dispute**

This is not the place to weigh the intricacies of all the arguments. But distinctions are important. The navigation dispute is specifically about military navigation in the seas around China. It is not about commercial navigation as such, where China itself depends crucially on seaborne trade, since some 40 per cent of China’s GDP is derived from trade. In that respect it shares precisely the same interest as the United States.

On national security grounds, the United States insists upon freedom of military navigation — maritime and aerial — up to China’s 12-mile (22-kilometre) territorial sea, which is essentially for spying and intelligence gathering. China asserts that such action infringes China’s national security interests. It urges Washington to desist. A basic question here, including for New Zealand, is do the security interests of the one trump the security interests of the other? It is, in fact, difficult to judge what extra intelligence the United States actually derives from its favoured patrolling practice that it cannot already obtain with its multiple satellite and other capabilities. On the sovereignty disputes alone, it is difficult to imagine a full scale US–China war solely over uninhabited rocks and islands in the South China Sea.

North Korean nuclear brinkmanship has, following several recent weapon tests, reached new intensity. Fractious, perverse North Korean behaviour fuels outside fears of an irrational North Korean government. The over-riding North Korean political objective is, however, to ensure survival of its regime, which has controlled the country for some 70 years. That regime believes perversely that possession of nuclear weapons provides insurance.
against overthrow at a time when regime change (particularly in the Middle East) seems an explicit article of geopolitical faith amongst powerful Western governments.

**Improbable scenario**

Despite all the belligerent rhetoric, the idea that North Korea would itself launch a first nuclear strike on the United States seems improbable. It is keenly aware that American retaliation in kind could obliterate the country from the face of the Earth. For Pyongyang nuclear weapons capability is, therefore, intrinsically for deterrence purposes; and possessing that capability is conceived by Pyongyang as well to earn it a place at the table as an equal to negotiate with the United States — thus reinforcing the regime's legitimacy as a sovereign power. Washington is adamant that North Korea unequivocally commit to denuclearisation as an absolute precondition to any negotiation. Pyongyang denounces that condition. But in all the circumstances, available options to physically halt North Korean nuclear ambition are very narrow.

An American military strike employing high precision weaponry would provoke a North Korean attack upon South Korea and even, perhaps, Japan. An American strike using nuclear weapons would be fraught with unimaginable consequences for North-east Asia, risking war with China and destabilising the engine force for the entire global economy. President Trump looks repeatedly to China as North Korea's patron for political pressure on Pyongyang. China, on its side, presses the United States, as the principal military power, to cease decades long, large-scale military exercising in South Korea, which provokes the North; and to indicate readiness for unconditional negotiation with North Korea. Washington firmly resists this advice. A new government in South Korea is committed to dialogue with the North and obviously prefers that the United States accepts that as well. It is really the only realistic way forward.

Finally, the very breadth and diversity of US problems in the Middle East overshadow America on the geopolitical landscape. They distract US attention from other challenges, like those in Asia. Just how many balls can even the mightiest power keep in the air at the one time?

Since 2001 the so-called global war on terror has dominated America and has been exercised as an organising principle for US leadership. It is war against a tactic, not an enemy country. Recent successes in Iraq and Syria against groups committed to establishing a new Islamic state are encouraging but cannot disguise the fact of the widening conflict in Yemen, Libya, Sinai and Afghanistan, as well as Syria and Iraq; and that complete victory seems a deception, particularly if basic causes and previous mistakes are not recognised.

The consequences of earlier miscalculations lie in the form of thousands upon thousands of refugees both within the region and spilling out to Europe — thus creating serious discord amongst governments there over responsibility for bearing the burden. These are monuments to serious miscalculations in the region by outsiders — the 2003 US-led coalition invasion of Iraq being a paramount example.

**Terrorist threat**

Terrorist groups, which are only a small minority in the world of political Islam, feed off mistakes and grievances at a time, too, when Islam itself confronts impacts of globalisation that have, as elsewhere, dislocated culture, beliefs and social stability; and where after a brief interlude of democratisation during the so-called 2011 Arab Spring, repressive governments have asserted control in many capitals with tacit or otherwise approval of powerful outsiders.

In absolute terms, the threat posed by terrorism to the world's geopolitical landscape should not be exaggerated. The existential dangers are nowhere as great as those posed, for example, by the Cold War and the prolonged 40-year US–Soviet nuclear confrontation. The physical existence today of the United States, or of other countries, is not endangered by the fact of Middle Eastern irregular warfare and terrorism, despite its cruel reach that now extends into Europe and elsewhere. There is, of course, no excuse at all for not strenuously pursuing eradication of the causes of terrorism, and the restoration of peace and stability in the Middle East.

Two related actions would assist in that task. First, a genuine effort should be made to finally end the Israel–Palestine conflict on the part of the United States, in particular by employing leverage over Israel, which America undeniably possesses, especially in respect to the illegitimate expansion of settlements to seize territory. It is gently ironic that American unwillingness here to use the power and influence of the patron over its client mirrors similar reluctance on the part of the Chinese over their client, North Korea. American willingness to do so in Middle East would strengthen Washington's ability to persuade the Palestinians to accept a reasonable outcome.

Second, efforts should be made to build upon the foundations for a better relationship with Iran that President Obama fashioned with the agreement (in company with others) to halt and verify Iranian nuclear weapon development. President Trump rejects that agreement. Iran is the largest non-Arab country in the region and with a degree of democracy that contrasts forcibly with authoritarian rulers in most of the Arab world who enjoy American support and lavish access to US armaments — whilst some are funders of terrorism. The mounting US demonisation of Iran actually denies geopolitical reality inside the Middle East. It serves to compound as well those mistakes that today litter the regional and global geopolitical landscape.

**NOTES**

EGYPT AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF LIBERALISM: Illiberal Intelligentsia and the Future of Egyptian Democracy

Editors: Dalia F. Fahmy and Daanish Faruqi

Perhaps the most distressing paradox of recent Egyptian history is that when General al-Sisi in 2013 overthrew the democratically elected government of Muhammad Morsi and replaced it with what amounts to a military dictatorship, he received the support of most of the secular liberal intelligentsia, who are supposedly committed to freedom of expression, human rights and democracy.

In the book under review here thirteen scholars specialised in the Middle East, and sharing the same values, seek to understand and explain why and how this happened. In general terms they describe the following situation.

Secular liberals are heirs to a rich legacy going back to the 19th century, but they are also an elite whose Western derived ideology has never won the hearts of the predominantly conservative Egyptian population. To survive and convey their message, they have largely had to rely on autocratic governments that have been secular but not liberal and they have had to compromise with these governments. They have also confronted a strong Islamist movement, which has a competing vision for society and a much larger following among the people. Its pre-eminent representative is the Society of the Muslim Brothers. When Muhammad Morsi, who was connected with the Muslim Brothers, was elected president the year after the popular uprising in 2011, they found this far too threatening. Following their longstanding ‘statist’ tendency, they supported the autocratic government after it overthrew the Islamist president in spite of its violations of human rights.

Chapters 8 and 9 in particular spell out these points in detail and note that both the liberals and the Muslim Brothers have a statist mentality and think the masses are not yet ready for democracy. Other chapters outline further details of the situation and present some of the background to it. One chapter summarises the history of liberalism in Egypt from its 19th century beginnings. Another traces the development of the student movement from the early 20th century. Yet another discusses the role of civil society and especially nongovernmental organisations that advocate for human rights.

Two others discuss the dysfunctional nature of Egyptian political parties, sketching parliamentary history since 2011, and the judiciary’s independence from the government or lack of it. Another discusses five ‘grand deceptions’ that trump liberal democratic values: state controlled development must precede democracy; some current concern is more important than anything else; national necessity; it is acceptable to use religion for political purposes; and the supremacy of the state (rooted in a romantic recollection of Nasserism). Another chapter discusses two individuals, one Syrian and the other Egyptian, and compares the situation in the two countries.

Three chapters focus on the liberals’ views of the Muslim Brothers. One notes that the liberals thought the Muslim Brothers were entrenching themselves in power and traces the background in party–state relations that encouraged this fear. Another discusses how the fear of the Muslim Brothers led liberals to make a ‘faustian’ bargain with the military and discusses the slightly different approaches of two individuals. Still another describes and counts several ‘myths’ that destroyed the Muslim Brothers: that they had foreign ties and were disloyal to Egypt and that they were anti-democratic and were taking too much power.

The concluding chapter reflects on the current crisis of liberalism in Egypt and proffers advice: synthesise liberalism with the religion and culture of the people, make its meaning clear, get over elitism and build appropriate institutions.

This is most definitely an academic book, written by scholars for scholars and others with a considerable interest in the subject, and thoroughly documented and argued. It will not be easy reading for someone with little prior knowledge about Egypt, but will not be impossible if one reads carefully. It is also a passionate book. The majority of the authors are of Middle Eastern background (at least four are from Egypt) and all appear to fall within the category of liberal intellectual. Thus, it is their own tradition, so to speak, that they are criticising: it is a major disaster within that tradition that they are examining and would like to reverse. Passion makes the book more interesting but also narrows one’s perspective; there are other views and approaches that would broaden our understanding of the events of 2011 and the following years, but they would hardly fit into this volume. There are two things I would like to see. One is a more sympathetic presentation of the views and actions of the liberals who support the military regime, preferably by one of them. These views can be gleaned from the present volume but are not presented sympathetically. The other thing is a focused and systematic account of Muhammad Morsi’s presidency, preferably in chronological order. Again, much of this information is present in the book.
but scattered in different places. Without such a focused and systematic account it is hard to judge many of the issues raised. These are supplementary possibilities and do not detract from the value and coherence of this book. In fact, I agree with most of the points made in the book.

As one who has both written about Egypt and visited it, I have been quite befuddled by what has happened there. So when I saw the title of this book I was attracted to it and, fortunately, had the opportunity to read it. I have not been disappointed, and I recommend it to anyone who is befuddled as I was.

WILLIAM SHEPARD

LAST HOPE ISLAND: Britain, Occupied Europe, and the Brotherhood that Helped Turn the Tide of War

Author: Lynne Olson
Published by: Scribe, Melbourne, 2017, 553pp, $49.99.

Former White House correspondent Lynne Olson has written a series of excellent books on the Second World War from various trans-Atlantic perspectives. (Her gripping account of pre-Pearl Harbor America entitled Those Angry Days outlines the struggle between Franklin Roosevelt and Charles Lindbergh’s isolationist ‘America First’ movement — a bitterness which was quickly forgotten once the American public got behind the ‘good war’ of opposing the Axis powers.) In Last Hope Island Olson puts the spotlight on the fact that the United Kingdom hosted the exiled governments and armed forces of six occupied nations (Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Norway, Czechoslovakia and Poland) while also playing host to France’s General Charles de Gaulle. These nations would serve as a force multiplier in the war effort. The volume acknowledges that it leaves aside Yugoslavia (whose King escaped to England, but was not central to events in his homeland) and the government-in-exile of Greece as it re-located to Cairo and not London. (Perhaps as a minor quibble it is a shame to have left Greece out, as, amongst other things, it was quite significant to Churchill’s plans to restore Britain’s naval reach and access to the Empire in the immediate post-war period.)

This is a story of coalition politics during wartime. These comrades-in-adversity were not entirely able to overcome pre-war suspicions and mistrust. Failures to build confidence and inter-operability prior to the onset of the Second World War would take its toll. Britain, France and Belgium all pointed the finger at each other for German divisions overrunning Belgium, and then the shock of a fairly quick French capitulation. There is a lot of blame to go around. Exile governments were not always consulted on military operations. While attempts to keep the forces of General de Gaulle away from the frontline in the Africa campaign would reinforce for the future French president that he could not trust his wartime allies — both during the war and well after it. But suspicions went even deeper still. Poland and Czechoslovakia attempted to forge a protective federation in the face of the spheres of influence carve-up between the Soviet Union and the United States. This deal would go nowhere, and partly because Poland had earlier taken advantage of a weakened post-Munich Czechoslovakia to seize the disputed Teschen region.

The overall assistance offer by exile governments to the United Kingdom was significant, including in ways that are probably not commonly known. Norwegian and Dutch merchant navies, the majority of vessels fleeing ahead of Nazi invasion, were critical to supplies for a Britain in straightened circumstances. Polish airmen, far more experienced than British counterparts, would play an outsized role in the Battle of Britain victory, and Polish intelligence was the first to break German intelligence codes. Attempts to have exile leaders and organisations stand up partisan resistance to the Nazi Occupation met with mixed success. In France and Poland uprisings were hugely costly in terms of lives with more limited contributions to overall Allied force objectives (which is not to deny the importance of resisting for occupied and subjugated populations), whereas in Norway resistance was very closely co-ordinated with Allied military operations.

Another theme revolves around the profiles of individual European leaders who made it to Britain to encourage (usually via the BBC) their occupied populations. In a number of cases these were leaders who had once warned their fellow countrymen and women, often in vain, about the rising threat that Hitler posed. Two such individuals were King Haakon VII of Norway and Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands — both of whom would breathe new life into their state monarchies and become leading symbols of nationhood. Charles de Gaulle, regarded by contemporaries as strange and aloof, was the youngest brigadier (aged 49) in the French army at the time he departed for England, but well before that he had established himself as one of the most prescient French officers in assessing the threat Hitler would ultimately pose to France. (As an interesting side note, it took some time for the British to be able to recognise de Gaulle’s side as the legal government of France — legal norms suggested that the actual government of France should in fact be Vichy France, a Nazi stooge. Perhaps a rare contrary example of where the law gets in the way of the right foreign policy decision.)

Last Hope Island’s final contribution is to reflect on Britain’s relationship with Europe during the war, and the major impact on European relations that would follow. As Churchill put it, Britain would need to ‘choose between Europe and the Open Sea’ — the United Kingdom would initially choose the latter, and interpret this as shoring up the trans-Atlantic and Commonwealth connections. One cannot help but wonder if the master strategist himself was thinking of yesterday’s world when he and other British leaders made this binary choice. Maybe it is only in hindsight that we can see that the devastated Europe was soon to re-emerge as an economic powerhouse, and many decades later the European Union would become collectively a larger economy than the United States. Britain failed to be one of the early movers of European integration, yielding that space to the Benelux countries, France and Germany. In the early 1960s, when Britain finally awoke to this opportunity, President de Gaulle would veto the idea. By the time the United Kingdom joined, in 1973, much of the groundwork for Europe was already in place, and London had been unable to influence foundational decisions (to include agricultural protectionism). One

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might be able to draw a straight line between that early failure to turn to Europe and a long history of British ambivalence towards Europe — which ultimately culminates in Brexit.

In summary Olson’s book is an excellent corrective to the public memory of the Second World War, in that it restores the role that a number of occupied European countries played in the war effort. In some cases these contributions may have been important to Britain’s own survival. It is also true that what occurred during those few critical years has echoes today in modern Europe.

ANTHONY SMITH

**TROUBLED TRANSIT**

*Asylum Seekers Stuck in Indonesia*

Author: Antje Missbach  

Behind every statistic there is a person. Behind every policy there are people impacted. Behind the masses of refugees that washed ashore in the Mediterranean or came in boats across the Pacific are individuals with stories, families, fears and aspirations. Migration, whether it is voluntary or not, permanent or not, is always about a person going from one place to another. At the heart of this is a human being with a story.

In *Troubled Transit: Asylum Seekers Stuck in Indonesia*, Antje Missbach, movingly and convincingly, tells the story of the people at the heart of recent history: those who seek to flee famine and war; get caught up in the nets of policies and exploitation alike; and travel illegally (and dangerously) to Indonesia — all with the hope of reaching the promise of Australia. Some make it; many do not. Some are sent back; some try again and again. By identifying the names, faces and stories of some of these asylum-seekers, Missbach brings in sharp relief the human cost of hope. Most readers of this book will not know the sea-sickness, the fear, the vulnerability, the victimisation, the opportunism, the resilience and the drama on the high seas of the asylum-seekers we read about here. But more readers will know about setting policies, charting public opinion, giving advice to ministers, inter-agency competition, diplomacy by megaphone and newspaper article, diplomatic detente and demarche — the high drama of the affairs of the state. All that is in this book too.

The book moves between these stories, with statistics and policies set out as well, sometimes in more detail than is necessary. The author seeks some theoretical scaffolding but does not quite succeed; the book is strongest in its empiricism, though there is an over-reliance on and lack of critical analysis of only a handful of stories. Missbach aims to provide balance and tell the stories of those on both sides of the asylum process, but — perhaps inevitably — is more sympathetic to the plight of the seekers than the governments who get in their way. These things though are not cut and dried. There will be legitimate reasons, even if driven only by polling, that the Australian government enacted its various Pacific solutions.

The book is divided into nine chapters, bookended by an introduction and brief conclusion. The chapters focus on Indonesia’s history (with parts more interesting than relevant); the politics of detention; life on hold, which explores the challenges and lives of migrants waiting in Indonesia; the limits of protection; Indonesia as a transit state; the Indonesian–Australian relationship; and selling hope, with brief case studies of people smugglers. The book aspires to be in two halves — ‘bottom-up, which evolves directly from the narratives of transit migrants’ and ‘top-down, which directs the focus to state perceptions’, but the delineation is not that clear and the bottom-up approach dominates throughout.

Missbach seeks to address the lacuna in the literature on ‘asylum seekers and refugees in Indonesia or Indonesia as a transit country’ and gets most of the way there. Certainly the title of the book, with its emphasis on ‘asylum seekers stuck in Indonesia’, is accurately reflected in the text. In giving voice to the asylum-seekers, Missbach offers a compelling contrast to the top-down view that sees asylum-seekers as a undifferentiated threat to a way of life.

ANDREW BUTCHER

**NZIIA PUBLICATIONS**

*New Zealand Trade Negotiations*  
Dr Stephen Hoadley  
RRP: $40 (incl GST)

*New Zealand United States Relations*  
Second edition revised  
Dr Stephen Hoadley  
RRP: $40 (incl GST)

Available from NZIIA National Office, PO Box 600, Wellington 6140.
Tina van Erpers Roijaards took up the position of executive secretary in the National Office in late June.

On 29 August a panel discussion was held at VUW on ‘Perspectives on the North Korean Stand-Off, More Than a War of Words?’. Chaired by Michael Powles, a senior fellow at the Centre for Strategic Studies, the speakers included four ambassadors: HE Seung-bae Yeo (South Korea), HE Scott P. Brown (United States), HE Wang Lutong (China), HE Toshihiisa Takata (Japan). They were joined by two CSS senior fellows: Paul Sinclair and Terence O’Brien.

Auckland
The branch AGM was held on 10 April. The following officers were elected:

Chair — Gregory J. Thwaite
Deputy Chair — Dr Ashok Sharma
Events Co-ordinator — Noelene Buckland
Committee — Nick Laery and Naomi Basson

The following meetings were held:
7 Jun Prof Alan Tidwell (director of the Center for Australian, New Zealand and Pacific Studies at the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University), ‘Recalibrating New Zealand’s Small State Foreign Policy’.
26 Jun Sir Lockwood Smith KNZM (former high commissioner to the United Kingdom), ‘An Outsider’s View from the Inside on Current British Politics’.
31 Jul HE Nineta Barbulescu (ambassador for Romania), ‘The View from Bucharest’.
7 Aug Prof Toshihiro Nakayama (Kippenberger chair, Victoria University of Wellington, and professor at Keio University Shonan Fujisawa Campus, Japan), ‘Japan’s Alliance with the United States in an Uncertain Era in East Asia’.
21 Aug A ‘Pre-election Forum on Foreign Affairs and Trade’ was held. Political parties were represented by David Parker MP (Labour Party), Carrie Stoddart-Smith (Maori Party), Barry Coates (Green Party) and Dr Jian Yang MP (National Party).

Nelson
The following meetings were held:
18 Jul HE Seung-bae Yeo (South Korean ambassador), ‘The Situation in the Korean Peninsula’.
10 Aug Gerald Hensley CNZM (former diplomat and secretary of defence), ‘Reflections on New Zealand’s Place in a Volatile World’.
14 Sep Charles Hufflett (tuna fishing leader), ‘The Global Fish War: A Tale of Two Seas’.

Wellington
The following meetings were held:
26 Jun Associate Prof Val Hooper (former head of VUW’s School of Information Management) and Dr Michael Daubs (lecturer in media studies, VUW), ‘Satire, Fabrication, and Vilification: The Diverse History of Fake News’. Closing remarks were given by NZIIA Life Member Stuart McMillan.
26 Jul Hon Daniel Guerrero (assistant dean of students for Texas State University and former mayor of San Marcos), ‘How the “United States of Texas” Points to America’s Best Future’. This meeting was held in conjunction with the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council.
31 Jul Pascal Lamy (Post-Contonou high-level facilitator, and former European commissioner for trade and WTO director-general), ‘Does One Size Fit All? European Thoughts about a Post-Contonou Agreement in the Pacific’. This meeting was held in conjunction with the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council, the European Union Delegation to New Zealand and the New Zealand Centre of International Economic Law.
10 Aug Benoît Pelopidas (junior chair of excellence in security studies at the Centre for International Studies, Sciences Po, Paris, affiliate of the Center for International security studies and Cooperation at Stanford University and a visiting fellow at Princeton University’s Program on Science and Global Security), ‘The Unbearable Lightness of Luck: Rethinking the Limits of Controllability of Nuclear Weapons’.
21 Aug HE Ntombizodwa Lallie (South African high commissioner in New Zealand), ‘Reflections on Progress in South Africa–New Zealand Relations, and on South Africa’s Emerging Role in Regional and Global Issues’.
Sir,

My wife and I were very disappointed and also sad to read the article ‘Climate change or climate catastrophe?’ by Hugh Steadman (vol 42, no 4). It is a very one-sided article, containing many untruths and half-truths. To mention a few:

- Steadman wrote: ‘carbon dioxide (the most plentiful of the greenhouse gases)’. This is not true. The most plentiful greenhouse gas is water vapour, accounting for 95 per cent of greenhouse effect. Carbon dioxide belongs to trace gases in the atmosphere, which together consist of less than 1 per cent of atmospheric gases. Carbon dioxide makes up only 3.86 per cent of the trace gases, of which carbon dioxide emitted by humans makes up only 0.12 per cent (or only 0.0012 per cent of all atmospheric gases).

- It sounds, of course, very dramatic to write, as Steadman did, that ‘mankind has pumped some 150 billion tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere’. But that is only 0.0012 per cent of all atmospheric gases.

- Steadman writes ‘that the current rapid acceleration of climate warming is man-made’. First of all, there is no convincing scientific evidence that carbon dioxide is causing, or will cause, dramatic global warming. The only evidence provided comes from unvalidated computer models. And it has been shown that all 102 climate models used by the IPCC strongly exaggerate warming, compared with real-world temperature data. Moreover, there has been no statistically significant warming for the last 20 years. The New Zealand Climate Science Coalition has offered $10,000 for anyone who can show, based on peer-reviewed scientific articles, and based on proper scientific fact-based data (not computer models), that carbon dioxide has a significant effect on global warming.

- Steadman writes ‘methane, which is being released at an increasing rate’. He blames this supposed increase on intensive livestock farming and fracking. Not true. Methane in the atmosphere has been declining in recent years. Methane emissions from fracking have been non-existent or extremely low.

- Steadman writes ‘The vast majority of scientists… are agreed on cause and effect: that an increase in greenhouse gases in the atmosphere results in an increase in planetary temperatures.’ This is another often-repeated myth. One often hears that 97 per cent of scientists agree on this. This was based on fraudulent research and has been debunked often. Moreover, scientific truth is not determined by a show of hands. There are thousands of well-qualifed scientists who do not accept that greenhouse gases, especially carbon dioxide, are causing or will cause any warming to be concerned about. If CO₂ will have any effect, it has been calculated that a doubling of CO₂ (and we are still far off a doubling, if ever we will reach that) will result in a warming of at best 1°C.

There are many websites, blogs and printed books that debate and criticise the man-made global warming dogma. However, it is unfortunate that most mainstream media are what is called left-liberal, and refuse to give any attention to opinions by critics. They prefer to call them climate sceptics or, even worse, climate change deniers. Down under I know of only one newspaper, the *Australian*, that publishes critical climate articles. That newspaper is from the Rupert Murdoch stable. Newspapers from the Fairfax stable, such as the *Press, DominionPost, New Zealand Herald*, etc, all support the man-made global warming dogma.

In 1998 and repeated in 2007, the so-called Oregon Petition in the United States was launched. The petition text is as follows:

We urge the United States government to reject the global warming agreement that was written in Kyoto, Japan in December, 1997, and any other similar proposals. The proposed limits on greenhouse gases would harm the environment, hinder the advance of science and technology, and damage the health and welfare of mankind.

There is no convincing scientific evidence that human release of carbon dioxide, methane, or other greenhouse gases is causing or will, in the foreseeable future, cause catastrophic heating of the Earth’s atmosphere and disruption of the Earth’s climate. Moreover, there is substantial scientific evidence that increases in atmospheric carbon dioxide produce many beneficial effects upon the natural plant and animal environments of the Earth.

It was signed by 31,478 people with academic degrees, including 9029 PhDs. Of course this petition was highly criticised by the global warming crowd.

There are groups of climate sceptic scientists all over the world (we prefer to call ourselves climate realists). They have active websites and blogs. To mention a few:

- In the Netherlands: Climategate.nl and De Groene Rekenkamer.
- In Germany: EIKE (Europäisches Institut für Klima und Energie — European Institute for Climate and Energy) and Notrickszone.com.
- In the United Kingdom: The Global Warming Policy Forum (GWPF).
- In New Zealand: The New Zealand Climate Science Coalition.

I have the impression that Steadman is not a scientist. The defining characteristic of a good scientist is that he or she is a sceptic. Thomas H. Huxley once wrote: ‘The improver of natural knowledge absolutely refuses to acknowledge authority, as such. For him, scepticism is the highest of duties: blind faith the one unpardonable sin.’

If some scientists express criticism of the man-made global warming dogma, many activists, instead of debating the critical comments, as a good scientist would do, express doubt about the scientific qualifications of the critics. For instance, that they may not be real climate scientists. That always amazes me. They would never say this about climate activists and propagandists. For instance, Al Gore is not a climate scientist; Pachauri, the former chairman of the IPCC, is a railway engi-
neer, not a climate scientist; Dr Kennedy Graham, the former climate spokesman of the Green Party, is not a climate scientist (I once debated him about climate in Christchurch). And so on.

Steadman refers to the fact that President Donald Trump has called the link between carbon dioxide and climate change a ‘hoax’. I agree with Steadman that it is not a hoax. However, I would agree with other critics that it is the biggest scientific scam in human history.

Steadman reproduces some graphs. Like Graph 1, which shows projected atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations. But again, this is based on non-validated computer models. The same is true for his Graphs 3 and 5. No wonder some critics have labelled such models as Rubbish in, Gospel out.

When Steadman writes about rising sea levels, he quotes Professor Peter Barrett of Victoria University, who is expecting a rise of around 2 to 2.5 metres by the end of this century. This expectation has no base in science. I know Peter well. We are both geologists-sedimentologists. However, he has become a climate activist. To give one example: in 1999, the Christchurch Press published an article under the heading ‘Ice sheet “on point of melting”’, in which it reported that Peter Barrett told leading visiting politicians that he and other polar scientists had serious fears that the Western Antarctic ice sheet was on the point of going. Scientists widely accepted that this could cause a sea-level rise of 6 metres.

There are many more points in Steadman’s article I could critically analyse. But the above should suffice.

I am a geologist and paleoclimatologist. I have been involved in the climate debate for more than fifteen years. Last year I published The Fable of a Stable Climate. In this 418-page book, I have collated many of my activities, like articles, essays, debates, etc. It contains essays on, among others, sea-level rise, global cooling, life without fossil fuels, etc. It has received good reviews. For more information about my book go to: www.book2look.com/book/9780473353490.

The final epilogue of my book, titled ‘Black Swans’, is a philosophical-analytical essay of the climate change dogma. In it I discuss, among others, one of the fundamental principles of good science, as developed by the well-known science philosopher Karl Popper. In 1934 he published his book The logic of scientific discovery, in which he put forth his well-known theory of falsifiability. He developed this theory to distinguish science from pseudo-science. It did not.

He describes himself as a ‘geologist-sedimentologist’ and ‘paleoclimatologist’ and the author of a book (heavily plugged in his letter) advocating the sceptics’ view on the subject of climate change. His letter is a typical specimen of ‘denier’ argument. The world-wide-web does not lack such claims, nor does history lack other examples of the human mind’s capacity for self-deception. Kingdoms and empires have fallen because of it, but, with the exception of its embrace of the doctrine of nuclear deterrence, never before has this trait caused our species to play tag with extinction. When, as in the instance of your correspondent, the weasel words are linked to the authoritative voice of ‘science,’ it is particularly pernicious.

Evidently, my arguments on the real and present danger posed by rapid climate change are suspect because Mr van der Lingen has ‘the impression that Steadman is not a scientist’. Judging from the space in his letter devoted to denigrating the views of other scientists, my ability to draw valid conclusions from the data available is not dependent on my having a background in the physical sciences. According to Mr van der Lingen, even with such a background, the vast majority of his fellow climate scientists are incapable of drawing what he views as the right conclusion.

I knew I was in for an ad hominem assault (my name is mentioned eleven times) on my powers of deduction when, at the outset of the letter, I am taken to task for not having cited water vapour as the major greenhouse gas. Even without a degree in the physical sciences, I can understand that one of the pre-requisites for scientific inquiry is the ability to distinguish between cause and effect. Increased concentrations of water vapour in the atmosphere are not initiators of global warming, but part of the feedback loop that accelerates the global warming that results from humanity’s increasing emissions of the other ‘trigger’ gases.

Further wool is pulled over our eyes by the claim that the gases cited by climate change ‘alarmists,’ such as myself, are present in such small percentages that they are hardly likely to affect the balance of the planet’s climate. We already have over 400 ppm of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Were that percentage to be of carbon monoxide, human life would cease in less than eight hours. The point Mr van der Lingen misses.
is that it is not ‘what is the ppm?’, but it is ‘the ppm of what’ that counts.

In his next paragraph, he argues that none of the forecasts about impeding climate catastrophe need be given too much credibility as ‘the only evidence provided comes from unvalidated computer models’. How, without a time-travel machine, should one validate a future forecast generated by a computer model?

Mr van der Lingen then goes on to debunk my claim that ‘the vast majority of scientists… are agreed on cause and effect: that an increase in greenhouse gases in the atmosphere results in an increase in planetary temperatures.’ He then quotes the figure of 97 per cent of climate scientists being in agreement with this supposedly delusional claim.

Though the 97 per cent figure was not quoted in my article, I do know where it came from. It is often quoted as a claim that 97 per cent of climate scientists agree that climate change is occurring and is a consequence of human activity (www.pnas.org/content/107/27/12107.full). In this fully peer reviewed and authenticated research paper, the 97–98 per cent claim was not originally made of all climate scientists, but of a validated sample of research papers dealing with global warming, all of which had also been peer reviewed.

The paragraph ends on the note that ‘If CO₂ will have any effect, it has been calculated that a doubling of CO₂ (and we are still far off a doubling, if ever we will reach that) will result in a warming of at best 1ºC.’ That simply begs the question ‘Who has made that calculation?’ Was it the American Petroleum Institute? The IPCC, the most widely recognised authority, has the level fluctuating between a low point of 180 and a high point of 280 ppm in previous inter-glacial warm periods. It is currently at 407 ppm. Last year it increased by a record 4 ppm. The IPCC also records that the average temperature has already increased by 1ºC since the start of the industrial age.

In fact the reader of Mr van der Lingen’s letter cannot help but note that the writer is strong on assertions, unsubstantiated by anything other than the existence of like-minded ‘sceptics’ but short on credible supporting evidence. If anyone wishes to agree with him that climate change is not a matter of extraordinary concern, they could do worse than visit this site, which takes a sceptical view of the arguments advanced by the climate sceptics: www.skepticalscience.com/argument.php.

The Arctic sea ice would be gone by 2013. It has not. On what evidence does Mr van der Lingen base his complacency? To quote from the Economist, OVER the past three decades the area of sea ice in the Arctic has fallen by more than half and its volume has plummeted by three-quarters. So says a report ‘Snow, Water, Ice, Permafrost in the Arctic’ (SWIPA), produced under the auspices of the Arctic Council, a scientific-policy club for the eight countries with territory in the Arctic Circle, as well as observers including China and India. SWIPA estimates that the Arctic will be free of sea ice in the summer by 2040. Scientists previously suggested this would not occur until 2070. The thickness of ice in the central Arctic ocean declined by 65% between 1975 and 2012; record lows in the maximum extent of Arctic sea ice occurred in March.

Sea-level rise would accelerate. It has not. Headline from the Scientific American (February 2016): ‘New data reveal stunning acceleration of sea level rise.’

Mr van der Lingen states that he and his wife ‘were very disappointed and also sad’ to read my article. In my turn I am sad and disappointed to read this letter by a professed scientist. Early in my article I quoted the precautionary principle:

The precautionary principle (or precautionary approach) to risk management states that if an action or policy has a suspected risk of causing harm to the public, or to the environment, in the absence of scientific consensus (that the action or policy is not harmful), the burden of proof that it is not harmful falls on those taking that action.

It is disappointing to find within the scientific community that there are still those who, out of what can be no more than professional hubris, throw precaution to the winds and attempt to persuade society that the effort and expense of adaptation to and mitigation against the onset of rapid climate change is unnecessary. One would expect a geologist and a palaeontologist to be particularly sensitive to the meaning of extinction.

There are two parameters against which risk should be judged and managed: the likelihood of the risk and the seriousness of the consequences, should it be realised. Risks with low likelihood and small consequences may well be ignored. However, what responsible person can argue that the continued burning of fossil fuels has been convincingly proven not to be harmful to humans or their environment?

In the light of the evidence accepted by an overwhelming majority of scientists, one has also to accept that the possibility of the risk being realised is at the higher end of the scale. Furthermore, should it be realised in full, among the multiple dire consequences is likely to be the extinction of humanity. Most people would place potential human extinction at the top end of the scale of undesirable consequences. Mr van der Lingen’s complacency should not be an option.
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