

Rt Hon Helen Clark Prime Minister

Address at Oxford Union "New Zealand Foreign Policy"

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Thank you for the opportunity to address you this evening on the subject of New Zealand foreign policy in the 21st century.

New Zealand is a small western democracy, located in the far south of the South Pacific. In strategic terms it is, as former Prime Minister David Lange once quipped, a dagger pointed at the heart of Antarctica.

Our nearest neighbours are close to 1200 miles away, or as far away as Moscow from London. Our borders abut the Pacific Ocean and Tasman Sea. Our isolation from others gives us the world's fifth biggest exclusive economic zone.

It stands to reason therefore that our nation will seldom occupy world headlines. We are simply too small and too remote.

But we do have values and interests which we seek to project internationally within a range of settings, not least of them our strong belief in nuclear disarmament.

It was that issue which last brought a New Zealand Prime Minister to the Oxford Union in a celebrated debate with the Reverend Jerry Falwell. David Lange's riposte to Falwell's pro-nuclear position, that he could "smell the uranium on your breath," still rates as a great line 22 years later.

The New Zealand Parliament in the mid 1980s legislated to declare our country nuclear free. That move enjoyed strong public support then, and does to this day - to the extent that it has become an accepted part of New Zealand's identity. Politicians tamper with it at their peril. It is a cornerstone of our independent foreign policy.

But independence of mind was not something which came quickly to New Zealand.

The journey of our modern nation began in 1840, when in the course of that year, Governor William Hobson signed the Treaty of Waitangi with representatives of many Maori tribes.

British colonial rule was thus extended to New Zealand. For the rest of the century and beyond, settlers poured in from the British Isles, for the gold rushes of the 1860s, to buy land, or generally to seek a better life.

The settlers retained a very strong bond with Britain as the mother country. New Zealand troops were at Britain's side through the South African War, two World Wars, and in Malaya. In at least one World War, the vagaries of the International Date Line saw us declare war on Germany before Britain did. We also served together in the United Nations force in the Korean War.

Just last week, we marked the centenary of long forgotten Dominion Day - the day on which New Zealand formally ceased being a colony of Britain and became a dominion within the British Empire.

In 1931 Britain adopted the Statute of Westminster enabling the dominions to have full competence over their own affairs, including their foreign and defence policies. Through today's eyes it seems extraordinary that New Zealand did not move to ratify that Statute till 1947.

Yet perhaps it can be explained by New Zealand's sense of insecurity. It was located 12,000 miles from the place which many still saw as home and on which it was trade dependent. By the 1930s also, there was growing concern about Japanese militarism and its projection in the region.

The course of the War in the Pacific, however, brought proof that Britain could not be a guarantor of far away New Zealand's security. The fall of Singapore shattered any remaining illusion.

The tide could only be turned against Japan, when, after the bombing of Pearl Harbour, the United States entered the war.

While difficult years still lay ahead, the American commitment in the Pacific, as in Europe, was decisive.

At the founding of the United Nations at the end of the War, New Zealand found its voice as a spokesperson for small nations.

We opposed the power of veto being given to permanent members of the Security Council - a position to which we adhere to this day. Indeed the existence of the veto has proved to be one of the barriers to Security Council reform and the creation of more permanent memberships.

The post war period saw New Zealand still very much focused on its relationships with Britain, the United States, and Australia in security terms. That outlook took us to Korea, Malaya, and most controversially to Viet Nam. The commitment of troops to Viet Nam produced significant division at home, for the first time, over a military deployment, and a questioning of what New Zealand's interests in the region really were.

New Zealand's role and interests in the Asia Pacific today are light years distant from what they were at the time of the Second World War. At best the Pacific had been a transit route to the Panama Canal, en route to Britain. Asia wasn't on the route at all.

But post war, new relationships were formed and diplomatic posts established in North and South East Asia. The Association of South East Asian Nations was formed, and New Zealand became a dialogue partner of it more than thirty years ago. This year marks our 35th year of diplomatic relations with China - our fourth biggest trade partner now, with Japan our third.

In the Pacific too, relationships changed as its small nations became independent, beginning with Samoa in 1962. The founding of the South Pacific Forum (now the Pacific Islands Forum) in the early 1970s saw New Zealand become immersed in the affairs of its near region.

And along the way New Zealand has changed too, from a population comprised until relatively recently of upwards of 85 per cent of people of predominantly British origin, around ten per cent Maori, and few others, to last year's census count of 14.6 per cent Maori, 6.9 per cent Pacific peoples, and 9.2 per cent peoples of Asian descent. People of European descent now number under seventy per cent.

We are thus a complex, multi-cultural society, but also one which by world standards lives relatively harmoniously. This too has a bearing on our foreign policy and how we project to the world.

We are used to living with difference at home. We are located in a region where we and Australia are the only Western democracies, and where only New Zealand, Australia, and Japan are classified as developed countries. So we are used to dealing with difference and complexity in our region too.

Let me now turn to the major themes of New Zealand foreign policy, before discussing regions of the world where we prioritise our engagement.

As a small country, we place a great deal of store on multilateralism and on a rules based international order. In a world where might is right, small countries lose out. So the authority of the UN Security Council, the World Trade Organisation, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and the myriad of other rules setting bodies matter to us.

Our major preoccupations in the international arena are:

Peace and security. This takes several forms. We continue to be very active on nuclear disarmament issues, working with colleagues in the New Agenda grouping of nations. In 2000 that grouping persuaded the membership of the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty to agree to thirteen practical steps on nuclear disarmament and non proliferation.

Since then nuclear disarmament has tended to take a back seat, as counter proliferation efforts have come to the fore. Yet while undoubtedly important, those efforts should not blind us to the risk nuclear weapons per se pose to global security.

New Zealand has been increasingly concerned at the lack of action by nuclear weapons states to lower the alert status of their arsenals. It is not widely known, but it should be, that despite the end of the Cold War, thousands of nuclear weapons remain on "hair trigger" alert. This not only increases the probability of the use of nuclear weapons overall, but also heightens the possibility of them being used accidentally or unintentionally. That would be catastrophic.

At this year's UN General Assembly New Zealand will launch an initiative to de-alert nuclear weapons. Along with our partners, Sweden and other interested countries, we will be asking all other countries to join us in sending a clear message that this situation cannot persist. This is the first time that this objective will be put forward as a resolution of the General Assembly, and demonstrates again New Zealand's willingness to stand up and be counted on key disarmament issues.

Another key priority for us on disarmament is tackling the great harm being caused around the world by cluster munitions. New Zealand has learned through the work of our defence forces of the terrible effects unexploded cluster munitions can have on the lives of communities trying to rebuild after war. At this very moment our second team of ordnance experts is working in Southern Lebanon to help remove up to a million remnants of these weapons.

Now we have joined a small group of countries, led by Norway, to push for the negotiation of a new international treaty on cluster munitions. Once concluded, we hope that such a treaty would provide clear rules on cluster munitions. We want to prevent communities suffering in future from the indiscriminate, unreliable, or inaccurate use of these weapons.

Next February we will host an international negotiation conference in Wellington where we anticipate substantial progress being made towards the conclusion of a new treaty.

New Zealand is committed to continuing its work on nuclear non-proliferation and arms control, as a contribution to a safer world.

We are also active in peacekeeping deployments internationally - across United Nations and UN-sanctioned missions from the Middle East and Africa to Asia and the Pacific. Our multicultural armed forces relate well to diverse communities, and our country takes a lot of pride in their work.

In Afghanistan, our primary role has been in Bamian province where we run a Provincial Reconstruction Team. We also deploy police and military trainers, and in earlier years have sent special forces.

Iraq did not meet our criteria for intervention in 2003 and we did not participate in the war there. We did, for one year, send New Zealand Defence Force engineers to do civilian reconstruction work, believing that was consistent with the United Nations mandate established in the course of 2003.

Trade policy. This looms very large on New Zealand's agenda, as our major export goods are agricultural - and therefore the most discriminated against under current world trade rules.

A successful WTO round is our top trade priority. For it to succeed it must deliver on opening up agricultural trade. That is also in the interests of the developing world. But New Zealand has strong interests in negotiations on industrials and services too, and is looking for an outcome which delivers more openness across the board.

Meantime in our own region we are forging new trade links with APEC partner economies. Our first free trade agreement was with Australia over 24 years ago. Now we have FTAs with Singapore and Thailand, and a sub regional FTA with Chile, Singapore, and Brunei. We have completed fourteen rounds of FTA negotiations with China. Negotiations for an FTA are also going on between ASEAN and Australia and New Zealand.

Environmental issues. The image of being clean and green is as strongly associated with New Zealand as is being nuclear free.

Our country is passionate about the environment, and we take that passion into international organisations on everything from whaling and the Antarctic, to fishing quotas, sea bird protection, and the Kyoto Protocol.

New Zealand has ratified the Kyoto Protocol; even though our unique greenhouse gas profile makes emissions reduction more challenging than for many nations. Fifty per cent of our emissions come from pastoral agriculture, which is also the source of tremendous wealth for our economy.

In recent weeks we have announced the design of a cap and trade scheme which puts a price on greenhouse gas emissions in the economy. I believe it is a world first in covering all sectors and all greenhouse gases. It will be phased in over the next five years.

We were also instrumental in getting climate change onto the agenda at APEC. This year's Leaders Summit in Sydney agreed to a communiqué on climate change which takes the level of commitment from developing countries further than has been possible in other for a. That's important - because while per capita the developed world is responsible for more emissions, it cannot solve the climate change problem on its own.

Our aspiration is to see New Zealand move towards carbon neutrality over time. We can reach it across our electricity sector by 2025 and in our transport sector by 2040.

Human rights. As one of the world's oldest continuous democracies, with our first Parliament elected in 1854, we do stand up for the rule of law and the human rights upheld by the United Nations.

Many of us in our current government cut our teeth in politics on the issue of South African apartheid. Sadly too few people around the world enjoy the personal freedoms we in western democracies take for granted.

Intercivilisation and interfaith dialogue. There are a number of initiatives worldwide now which seek to bridge the divide which has become so apparent between the western world with its Judaeo-Christian ethos and the Islamic world.

New Zealand believes it has something to contribute to this debate, given its own multicultural, multifaith population, and its reputation for peacekeeping in and relationship building with diverse nations.

This year we have hosted the third Regional Asia Pacific Interfaith Dialogue, and also the first regional forum to be held anywhere in the world on the United Nations' Alliance of Civilisations initiative. The latter is a direct challenge to Huntington's bleak prophecy of the inevitability of a clash between civilisations - a notion we reject.

Development assistance. In terms of the proportion of Gross National Income devoted to Official Development Assistance, New Zealand is at the lower end of Western nation contributions, although we are on track to boost what we give to 0.35 per cent by 2010/11.

In terms of broader definitions of contributing, however, we rate highly, taking into account our very open markets for goods from developing countries; the labour mobility we provide for people from the South Pacific, and our contribution to peacekeeping. Without basic stability, all the ODA in the world can't make a difference to development.

This leads me to comment on regions of the world where New Zealand has particularly close engagement, beginning with our near neighbour Australia and the South Pacific.

The New Zealand and Australian economies are closely integrated and our labour markets are open to each other. Our governments liaise on many issues, and our defence forces co-operate closely.

While we do not agree on all international issues, nonetheless the ties which bind us make us like family members to each other.

We are both very immersed in the affairs of the South Pacific, bilaterally and through the Pacific Islands Forum. The bulk of New Zealand's development assistance goes there, focusing on poverty alleviation, sustainable rural livelihoods, health, education, and good governance.

We have also been drawn into peacekeeping and stabilisation work, in Bougainville in Papua New Guinea and in the Solomon Islands.

Some support was required in Tonga after last November's disastrous riots too.

Fiji is a major issue of regional concern with the coup d'etat last December being the fourth in nineteen years. Fiji's development has been severely impeded by its manifest coup culture. New Zealand and others have a wide range of sanctions on Fiji at present, while also endeavouring to work through the Pacific Islands Forum and with other partners on supporting Fiji to move back to constitutional government.

The broader Asia Pacific is also a huge priority for us, working through the trans-Pacific APEC organisation and the many bilateral and regional relationships we have in East Asia. The APEC nations account for seventy per cent of our total trade. Forty percent of our trade is with Asia alone.

The summitry associated with the Asia-Pacific regional institutions has led to leaders, ministers, and officials all getting to know each other well. The regional parallel here in Europe would be with the European Union. Clearly integration is much more advanced here than in the Asia-Pacific but the relationship building which paves the way for more integration is well under way.

On the agenda for discussion in the region now are proposals at APEC for a Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific, and at the East Asia Summit for a Closer Economic Partnership of East Asia.

The East Asia Summit first convened in Kuala Lumpur in December 2005. It is associated with the annual ASEAN summit, and with ASEAN's summits with the Plus Three grouping of China, Japan, and Korea.

The East Asia Summit brings together all of ASEAN, the Plus Three nations, India, New Zealand, and Australia. From its first meeting focusing largely on form and structure, it has moved quickly to discuss issues of substance around energy security and trade.

New Zealand also sees it as the logical regional forum for discussion of intercivilisational issues. Long term the vision is for an East Asian community to emerge. All this for New Zealand is a far cry from the days when Asia was circumvented en route to Europe.

But I must emphasise that relationships with Europe remain exceedingly important to New Zealand. We see ourselves as members of a community of shared values and as natural partners in a globalising world.

Britain and Germany are significant trade partners for us in their own right and the European Union taken as one unit is our second biggest market.

Rather than time and distance attenuating links, the reverse is happening as we formalise and deepen our relationship with Europe across education, science, and policy and security dialogue and co-operation.

The same is true of our relationship with the United States.

For more than twenty years, it came to be characterised by the issues which divided us, which given the overall commonality of views and values, was inappropriate. A lot of work has been done by both of us now to strengthen the relationship without either resiling from strongly held views, and we have made a lot of progress.

As a small nation, New Zealand does not have the resources to conduct intense relationships with all the world's regions.

But where our interests have been more modest, we work strategically; as with Latin America, where we have focused on five key relationships and built governmental dialogue, trade and investment links, and education, cultural, and youth exchanges.

In the Middle East, we have had a defence force presence on and off since the First World War deployment in Palestine, and then the North African campaign of World War Two. To this day, we are not only involved in Afghanistan but also in the UN Truce Supervision Organisation, in the UN Mine Action Service in Lebanon, and in the Multinational Force (MFO) in the Sinai. We have also opened our first ever diplomatic post in Egypt to give us a wider window on the Arab world.

The Commonwealth remains our main window on Africa and the Caribbean, and I look forward to this year's Heads of Government in Uganda.

From my comments today it will be apparent that New Zealand's window on the world is rather different from that of European nations like Britain. While we share the same values and take up many of the same issues, each of us also tends to focus most directly on bilateral and regional relations in the areas closest to us.

For New Zealand, that means the Asia Pacific. That is a huge reorientation from where we were at the outbreak of the Second World War, when we tended largely to ignore our own neighbourhood.

My foreign policy objective as Prime Minister has been to see New Zealand positioned as a principled, constructive, and engaged international citizen.

Nothing therefore could have given me greater pleasure than seeing New Zealand ranked second, after Norway, in the Global Peace Index, compiled with support from the Economist Intelligence Unit, and released a few months ago.

The Index rated levels of peace for over 120 nations across 24 indicators, ranging from a nation's level of military expenditure to its relations with neighbouring countries, and its level of respect for human rights.

It goes without saying that I take great pride in being Prime Minister of a country ranked so highly on indicators like these, and in being able to address you on the story behind those ratings this evening.