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# *DOES INTELLIGENCE-SHARING MEAN POLICY ALIGNMENT?*

BY REI KOGA

***Rei Koga*** *(rei.koga@kcl.ac.uk) is a Ph.D. student in International Political Economy at the Department of European and International Studies, King's College London (KCL) as well as WSD-Handa Research Fellow at Pacific Forum.*

In June 2024, Japan and New Zealand announced that they had reached a general consensus on an Information Security Agreement (ISA). While details on the exact nature of the agreement are yet to be published, it might be safe to assume that this is a step toward further bilateral security cooperation, given New Zealand's increasingly proactive approach to the emerging regional security architecture. However, while they closely work together, intelligence sharing does not necessarily equate to security policy alignment.

The New Zealand Intelligence Community (NZIC) consists of three agencies: the National Assessment Bureau in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet for intelligence assessment; the New Zealand Intelligence Security Services (SIS) for domestic security intelligence; and the Government Communications and Security Bureau for signals intelligence. New Zealand has increased its engagements in Asia, especially after the UK joined the European Union, as pointed out by both academics and practitioners. Yet, New Zealand has never given up being a member of the Five Eyes community, although it retreated from the 1951 ANZUS Treaty with the US and Australia in the 1980s. One of the institutional strengths of the Five Eyes framework is that they hold an annual summit and defense ministerial meetings, where they set their security agendas, coordinate their stances, and share mindsets. Yet, despite their shared views, the New Zealand government occasionally deviates from the discourse of the other member countries. A recent and stark example would be 2021, when New Zealand stepped back from the US, Canada, the UK, and Australia's joint condemnation against China's treatment of its Uyghur Muslim minority. This is especially at odds with the fact that the Five Eyes community only recently declared a more expanded relationship with other member countries to include the diplomatic sphere.

This prompts the question of what enables intelligence sharing to contribute to policy alignment? Intelligence-sharing platforms and agreements oftentimes foster shared worldviews. This is the result of similar types of analysis on similar information leading to similar conclusions in different countries, enhanced by the knowledge that its partners share the same conclusions. To establish such mechanisms first requires the recognition of common security interests, as well as building trust in how each partner country handles confidential information. While we can assume that such agreements are mutually beneficial, the existence of an intelligence-sharing mechanism alone does not necessarily mean their regional security policy will be aligned between participants. It is policymakers with intelligence assessment inputs, not intelligence agencies themselves, who primarily engage in policymaking. Policy is thus dependent on to what extent the intelligence agencies' threat assessments can convince policymakers' mindset.

In the case of New Zealand's intelligence agencies and domestic politics, so far they seem to have had limited influence on the wider policy community. The intelligence role is still limited and institutional pathways for their influence are less developed compared to more robust institutions in other Five Eyes countries. Furthermore, there is also lingering mistrust within New Zealand society against its intelligence agencies originating from the Kim Dotcom incident, where the agencies allegedly conducted unlawful surveillance of the accused.

New Zealand's intelligence agencies have since put more effort into increasing their public appearance as well as better communicating with the public, much

like other Five Eyes countries. However, only in 2023 did New Zealand publish a threat assessment document, with the second of its kind coming in early September 2024. While such increased public engagements will contribute to more policy influence, their discourse is not completely in sync with other government agencies. For instance, New Zealand's intelligence agencies described strategic competition surrounding New Zealand as largely framed between the People's Republic of China and New Zealand and its traditional security partners. This seems to be a deviation from New Zealand's traditional stance. David Capie, a leading New Zealand scholar, described it as a surprise to the previous New Zealand governments that have spent much of the last decade rejecting precisely that framing. He also noted the importance of the SIS' recognition that foreign interference is not limited to strategic competitors but also ostensibly friendly countries, especially following Five Eyes' accusations toward India. The Indian government was first accused of organizing the assassination of Khalistan Tiger Force leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar in June 2023 by the Canadian government. New Zealand joined in October 2023 with other Five Eyes countries in condemning New Delhi of threatening to unilaterally revoke Canadian diplomats' privileges and immunity unless Ottawa reduced the number of envoys it had in India. The question is, if such intelligence agencies' attitudes that are more aligned with their traditional security partners will eventually lead to actual and consistent policy alignment. One caveat for answering this question is that the threat assessment document states that it is not a government policy document, but rather the SIS' independent assessment. This is odd since the intelligence agency by which the publication was made is part of the New Zealand government. How should we interpret this? Government publications usually follow standard operational procedure, which requires any strategic document to be checked and approved by senior government officials and political decision-makers. The point is that for the most part, not all politicians and government officials are included in the chain, but key persons within the government. Thus, we ask what made the SIS include such caveats.

My interpretation is that the New Zealand government could not reach a consensus prior to publication. Reasons for debate could include not wanting to alienate the large Chinese ethnic community in the country, as page 14 of the document states that it does not intend to securitize certain ethnic communities. Another reason could be that New Zealand politicians are generally skeptical of intelligence agencies, which made it difficult to get the green light from senior ministers to issue the document as the government's official position.

While the analysis of the recent SIS security assessment is only one example for evaluating to what extent such cooperation will lead to policy alignment, it is a good example to see how the New Zealand intelligence agencies' views have been accepted in the wider domestic policy community. A relatively underdeveloped intelligence community and low trust from the policy/political community grant the New Zealand intelligence agencies less influence on the current Luxon government's foreign policy and its policy alignment with its Five Eyes counterparts.

While intelligence cooperation between Japan and New Zealand will provide both with opportunities, in Japan's case more intelligence on the Pacific Islands and in New Zealand's case on North Korea and China, there is still work left to tackle. As intelligence cooperation ventures into uncharted territory, it is important to have an oversight mechanism established, both in the parliament and the government to retain democratic control of the government. For such oversight mechanisms to properly work or even be established, the scope and powers of the intelligence agencies need to be written into law, and after that it can be appropriately supervised by political authorities. Japan currently lacks proper intelligence agency governance and will benefit greatly from an established, organized, and official agency with oversight. For New Zealand, it will benefit further from incorporating former intelligence officials in its oversight committee to fill in the gap of understanding between the intelligence agencies and the government and the public as a whole, therefore gaining more public trust.

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