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<v SPEAKER_2>On this episode of Defence Deconstructed, recorded July 11th, 2025, I'm talking to Dr.

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<v SPEAKER_2>David Capie for another Triple Helix iteration of the podcast.

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<v SPEAKER_2>David is a Professor of International Relations and Director of the Centre for Strategic Studies at the Victoria University of Wellington.

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<v SPEAKER_2>We talked about the recent defence strategy developments in New Zealand, which culminated in the publication of New Zealand's New Defence Capability Plan.

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<v SPEAKER_2>David, welcome to Defence Deconstructed.

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<v SPEAKER_1>Hi, Dave.

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<v SPEAKER_1>Lovely to join you.

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<v SPEAKER_2>So we wanted to have you on because we had the chance to meet a few months ago when you were in Ottawa on a research trip.

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<v SPEAKER_2>I know that you closely follow what happens with New Zealand strategic policy, foreign affairs direction, and you folks now have a couple of new bits of defence direction.

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<v SPEAKER_2>Maybe just start off by telling us what your government has published and how that fits within the New Zealand government's ecosystem of policy direction.

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<v SPEAKER_1>Yeah.

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<v SPEAKER_1>Well, thanks, Dave.

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<v SPEAKER_1>It was great to see you in Ottawa in November.

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<v SPEAKER_1>It feels like a long time ago now.

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<v SPEAKER_1>Lots has happened since then.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So New Zealand, I think it's fair to say has not been, until comparatively recently, hasn't been one for putting out a whole lot of strategies and policy documents.

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<v SPEAKER_1>That's really changed in the last two or three years.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And the latest piece of paper to come out of the government defence and security ecosystem is what's called a Defence Capability Plan.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And really, it's sort of the final part of what I would describe as a kind of multi-piece.

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<v SPEAKER_1>It's like a defence white paper in several pieces, as part of a defence review that really began actually under the previous government in 2022, which started with a kind of an overview of the strategic environment, an assessment of the strategic environment.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And then secondly, moved on to say what sort of defence force did New Zealand need?

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<v SPEAKER_1>And then finally, in this third phase, talked about the capabilities and then the investment that would be required to deliver that.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And so, that and also alongside a number of documents from the Foreign Ministry and National Security Strategy for the first time, the security agencies publishing their first ever public threat assessments.

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<v SPEAKER_1>It's suddenly gone.

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<v SPEAKER_1>We've suddenly gone from not having too many of these strategy documents to a whole flurry all in the last couple of years.

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<v SPEAKER_2>And from your vantage point, what's been the motivation to make that shift of not having too many pieces of paper to now having lots of them?

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<v SPEAKER_1>I think, Dave, I think really the context, there are two key features here.

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<v SPEAKER_1>If we think back to when this Defence Review really began, 2022, partly it was shaped by the changing strategic environment.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So front of centre then was the invasion of Ukraine.

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<v SPEAKER_1>But also just the growing use of coercion in the Indo-Pacific senses that an international rules-based order that had been very favourable to New Zealand was increasingly under stress and change.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And then we were seeing more states resorting to hard power to get what they wanted.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So I think on the one hand, there was a sense that the strategic environment was changing and New Zealand needed to get a sense of what that meant.

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<v SPEAKER_1>But secondly, coming out of COVID, I think there was also a recognition that the defence force was really under huge stress and in some ways close to breaking point.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So you had had, the defence force had been used in a whole lot of COVID related activities, which had, I think, accelerated some attrition.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So you had huge attrition across the three services, problems with where you had skilled people missing.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So that meant that even if you had ships that were serviceable, you couldn't go to sea.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And there were these looming questions after decades across parties of left and right of underinvestment in defence.

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<v SPEAKER_1>You had some big questions about looming obsolescence of some big platforms, particularly in Navy, where I think the New Zealand Navy, about almost all of its ships by one, were really reaching the end of their lives by the by the 2030s.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So you had this changing strategic environment.

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<v SPEAKER_1>Things looked a lot more challenging.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And at the same time, you had a defence force that was increasingly struggling to actually provide the outputs to government that it promised.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And I think that was the beginning of this process that said, OK, if we're going to have a if we're going to ask government and the public to invest in defence, what do we want it for?

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<v SPEAKER_1>How do we make the case for that?

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<v SPEAKER_2>So we'll come back to the defence-specific portions of this paper trail in a minute, maybe just take a couple of minutes.

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<v SPEAKER_2>And for a Canadian audience, what would be kind of a couple of the most notable aspects of the national security or the foreign policy situation of the defence-specific guidance that you folks have just announced?

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<v SPEAKER_1>So the government that's been in place since the end of 2023 has pushed for what it calls a foreign policy reset.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And it has a kind of, I think it has a significant security and defence component.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And that really, I think, if I wanted to boil it down in simple terms, I would say to a couple of things.

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<v SPEAKER_1>One is it talks about leaning into what we call in New Zealand, sometimes traditional partnerships.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So Australia, the US, Canada, the UK, those five eyes relationships.

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<v SPEAKER_1>But it also has a pretty significant Indo-Pacific flavour as well.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So there's been a significant step up in engagement across ASEAN with lots of ministers travelling and also to North Asia as well, Japan and Korea.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And alongside that sort of increased diplomatic engagement, we've seen, for example, the conclusion of SOFA with the Philippines, logistic agreements with the Philippines.

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<v SPEAKER_1>They've just begun an AXA agreement with Japan, an increase in tempo of deployment of New Zealand assets to the region.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So for example, P8s to contribute to DPRK sanctions, enforcement, ships and so on.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So I think there's been a deliberate increase across the sort of foreign policy spectrum of trying to put more of a security emphasis on things.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And then alongside that, there's obviously been the conclusion of this defence review.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And there I think some of those same themes play out.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So the defence capability plan, for example, puts a lot of emphasis on working with partners, a lot of emphasis on the relationship with Australia, talking about much closer integration,

interoperability, and so on.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And then I think probably one of the other things is also, you know, New Zealanders have tended to think about their defence force a lot through the lens of, for example, HADR, responding to sort of low level contingencies and so on, civil defence.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And I think one of the things about the Defence Capability Plan is it really puts front and centre this idea of a combat capable force and needing to invest in some capabilities to be able to be credible as such a force.

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<v SPEAKER_2>I guess, so building off from there, what are some of the most notable aspects of this, maybe both substantively in terms of the investment, but then also in your view, what's novel or different to this kind of iteration of New Zealand formal policy direction that you haven't seen in the past, beyond just the shift that you were describing in terms of more lethal forces, I guess, maybe to simplify things.

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<v SPEAKER_1>Yeah, I mean, I think one of the things is just simply a straightforward public conversation about the need to spend more and invest more.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So defence spending has been around 1% for a long time, occasionally spiking up when, for example, the P3s were replaced by the P8s, but very low levels of consistent defence spending.

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<v SPEAKER_1>I think one of the things that the DCP does is make that argument, make that case for new investment.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And so you're seeing, for example, it focuses on a four-year window.

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<v SPEAKER_1>It talks about \$12 billion of new spending, \$12 billion of investment, \$9 billion new into the baseline.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So by New Zealand standards, a fairly significant increase in defence spending.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And then I think also that the other thing that I think is significant is there's been an emphasis on closer integration with Australia in particular.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And so you've seen across the three services now all have plans for how they can work more closely with the Australian Defence Force.

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<v SPEAKER_1>You're seeing, for example, high-level exchanges between the two defence forces.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So the Deputy Commanders for Joint Operations in Australia is a New Zealander, and vice versa here in New Zealand, looking to exercise more, to do more together.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And so I think that those are a couple of things that I think are front and centre in the capability plan.

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<v SPEAKER_2>Across your Armed Forces, were there any particular components, any of the services that are viewed as having been particularly benefited by this review?

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<v SPEAKER_2>You'd mentioned that the state of some of the Navy ships were getting to the point of needing replacements.

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<v SPEAKER_2>Is there a view that any particular part of the Armed Services there won as part of this review exercise?

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<v SPEAKER_1>I don't think there's a sense of that.

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<v SPEAKER_1>I mean, in some ways, as I said, the focus of this plan is really the next four years, and some of the really big decisions

are still just around the corner or just over the horizon.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So for example, the frigate replacements, the multi-role vessel that's very important for New Zealand's work in the Pacific.

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<v SPEAKER_1>All of those big platforms are outside of this immediate four-year window.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So I mean, actually, front and centre off the rank, first cab off the rank in terms of actually new capabilities are things like maritime helicopters.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So the old sea sprites are starting to have got to very much to the end of their life, and so that's one of the first new capabilities that's been brought on to extend the range of the frigates.

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<v SPEAKER_1>There's a frigate upgrade program to sort of stretch out their life into the 2030s.

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<v SPEAKER_1>I was going to say, some of the, I suspect some of this is sounding very familiar to Canadians.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And one of the other commitments that's up front early is interestingly enough is strategic lift.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And the funny thing is that in New Zealand, that had become sort of synonymous in media coverage with quote, VIP transport, because it's the, you know, if our prime minister goes to, I don't know, Singapore and wants to take a business delegation and trade delegation and media with him, they often take the 757.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And so for a long time, you would, I think political leaders were of the mind that you couldn't be seen to be spending money on VIP transport, let alone the fact that it actually does all these very other things most of the time for the defence force.

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<v SPEAKER_1>But I think these capability, these planes had got to the point where they were breaking down so often, that actually it became a kind of bipartisan.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And the public, I think, had got to the point where it's like, just buy some new planes.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So those are up early.

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<v SPEAKER_1>But there's, as I said, there's also some commitments in there that are, for example, long-range strike for potentially arming the P8s.

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<v SPEAKER_1>There's commitments around space, around uncrewed systems and so on.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So, but I don't get the sense that any one particular service feels that they've struck gold.

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<v SPEAKER_2>So you mentioned a couple of those specific technology investments.

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<v SPEAKER_2>I think one of the things that when you had been in Ottawa, we discussed a little bit that the non-AUKUS members of the Five Eyes were interested in what some of the other emerging technology or advanced capability investments were looking like.

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<v SPEAKER_2>Are there any investments that I saw a brief mention of that in the document, but are there any things that caught your eye in terms of your national framework about particular New Zealand interest in emerging technology, dual use technology or innovation type investments in that wider, I guess, of note for another non-AUKUS member of the Five Eyes interested in where other people are going with some of their advanced technologies?

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<v SPEAKER_1>I mean, I think the technologies that have been identified in the DCP that are emerging or coming into service are really in the uncrewed autonomous space.

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<v SPEAKER_1>Particularly, I mean, New Zealand's maritime environment is vast.

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<v SPEAKER_1>I mean, over 4 million square kilometers of EZ.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So, you know, phenomenally large area to try and keep that awareness on.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So I think there's commitments in the plan to bring into service persistence, surface surveillance, further down the tracks, underwater surveillance systems and long-ranged uncrewed aircraft.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So those are some of the particular technologies that I talked about in the plan.

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<v SPEAKER_1>In terms of some of the other emerging technologies, AI, quantum and so on, those are certainly in the broader conversation here in Defence.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And the Minister of Defence has got a strong interest in, and she likes to emphasise the fact there are small New Zealand niche contributions in some of these technologies that people will be surprised of.

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<v SPEAKER_1>The AUKUS debate here has sort of retreated into the background a little bit.

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<v SPEAKER_1>You know, the government's position is that it's still learning, it wants to learn more about what it might mean to participate in some of these pillar two non-nuclear activities.

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<v SPEAKER_1>But obviously, some of the churn and disruption out of Washington that we've seen over the last six months or so has made that probably more politically contentious here.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And so I think there's a strong interest in those technologies, but it doesn't feel like there's a lot of push from the government to emphasize some opportunity to join in the short term.

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<v SPEAKER_2>Just as a final reflection, what was the sense among folks like yourself in terms of how the government did as it went through this policy exercise?

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<v SPEAKER_2>Are people largely happy with the outcome?

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<v SPEAKER_2>Are there key things that people felt should have been included but weren't?

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<v SPEAKER_2>Or what's the general sentiment and reaction from your view?

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<v SPEAKER_1>Yeah, that's a great question, Dave.

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<v SPEAKER_1>I think one of the things that's probably struck me about this whole process is I think there's been a sense that New Zealanders really feel that we haven't had to invest in these kinds of technologies, that we don't need to, that this is wasteful spending and so on.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And I think successive governments have nervously approached some of these questions.

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<v SPEAKER_1>Feeling, well, we don't want to be spending money on defence because that's not going to win us any votes and it's going to come at the cost of social programs and so on that are also hugely important.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And that's probably, you would think that's been sharpened by the fact that right now it's a pretty difficult fiscal environment and social environment here at the moment.

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<v SPEAKER_1>A lot of cost of living pressures and so on.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And I think probably the thing that's been most surprising to me in some ways is the way that New Zealanders have sort of responded by sort of thinking, well, yeah, I mean, the world is a more challenging place.

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<v SPEAKER_1>It feels like a more dangerous place.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And we do need to have some of these capabilities

ourselves.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And we need to actually be working closer with partners, particularly with Australia.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And it's been interesting.

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<v SPEAKER_1>There's been a bit of public opinion polling on this.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And almost across the political spectrum, you're seeing support for more spending.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So that's, I think, in some ways is an indication of, I think, a better informed public conversation.

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<v SPEAKER_1>So I think, as I said, this defence review process began under the previous government.

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<v SPEAKER_1>It's culminated under the current one.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And I think over that time, partly just the changes in the broader strategic environment, the public has kind of come along with this.

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<v SPEAKER_1>And I think accepted that this is investment that needs to be made.

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<v SPEAKER_2>Well, David, thank you very much for joining us today to bring some of that conversation in New Zealand to a Canadian audience.

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<v SPEAKER_2>That last question I'll ask you is the one we ask all of our guests.

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<v SPEAKER_2>What are you reading?

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<v SPEAKER_1>Well, thanks, Dave.

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<v SPEAKER_1>Well, I just finished reading a fantastic book by Barbara Demick called The Daughters of the Bamboo Grove, which is about China's one-child policy, which is a sensational read.

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<v SPEAKER_1>All her books are marvellous.

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<v SPEAKER_1>Then on a work front, I've just started a new book about the US's autonomous weapons systems arsenal called The Hand Behind Unmanned by Julia MacDonald and Jacquelyn Schneider, which looks fantastic, so I'm looking forward to getting stuck into that.

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<v SPEAKER_2>Okay.

00:18:20.091 --> 00:18:23.711

<v SPEAKER_2>Well, David, thanks again for joining us so much on Defence Deconstructed today.

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<v SPEAKER_1>Pleasure, Dave.

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<v SPEAKER_1>Thanks so much for having me.

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<v SPEAKER_2>Thanks for listening to Defence Deconstructed.

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