

KEEP SPACE FOR PEACE 4/9/22

Murray Horton

My job today is to provide some context for this meeting's subject, which is Keep Space for Peace. Expose Rocket Lab For What It Is – namely, a US company using NZ as its base and launch site for satellites for US military and spy agencies. In so doing, Rocket Lab drags NZ into US wars – it's a safe bet that some of the payloads it has launched are being used in the Ukraine War. Meaning that Rocket Lab's Mahia Peninsula launch site is a US base (albeit, one that is privately owned), as is its Auckland HQ.

I won't be going into detail about Rocket Lab today. That task is being left to Kevin Clements, in a 30 minutes online interview we will be screening. It was done in mid-2021, so needs a bit of updating to cover the subsequent year and a bit. My job is to briefly look at the overall NZ/US relationship as it is today, which provides the political context in which Rocket Lab thrives.

It has become apparent that New Zealand is getting more entangled in the US empire than ever before. Don't be fooled that NZ and America's longest war – Afghanistan – is over and ended in abject defeat by the Taliban and withdrawal in August 2021. Or that NZ was not invited to join the new AUKUS pact between the US, UK and Australia, to provide the latter with nuclear powered (but not nuclear armed) submarines. NZ's nuclear free policy might rule out any such subs using our waters but NZ, under this Labour government, has expressed keenness to be involved with other aspects of AUKUS.

The Waihopai spy base has been NZ's most important service for the US empire for decades. In 2021 the Government announced that it would be dismantling and decommissioning Waihopai's two most unmissable features, namely the giant white domes that covered the satellite interception dishes within. Both dishes and domes were declared obsolete 20th Century relics that were no longer fit for purpose for 21st Century spying. They were removed in 2022. But the Government has no intention of dismantling the spy base itself; instead, it is being modernised to use more efficient (and less glaringly conspicuous) methods of spying.

All of this, from NZ's involvement in Afghanistan to operating Waihopai on behalf of the US National Security Agency (NSA), is governed by NZ's decades-long membership of Five Eyes, the electronic spying agreement between the US, UK, Canada, Australia and NZ (originally it was referred to by its formal title, the UKUSA Agreement; Five Eyes is a more recent name). But it is much more than that – Five Eyes is a de facto geopolitical bloc. It has become the modern equivalent of ANZUS, from which nuclear free NZ was expelled in the 80s.

When John Key sought to justify New Zealand getting involved in the war against ISIS in Iraq, he said that NZ's involvement in American-led wars like that was "the price of the club" i.e., the price of the "privilege" of belonging to Five Eyes. NZ is in Five Eyes, boots and all. And the US, under Joe Biden, is keen to use blocs like Five Eyes as part of his "Indo-Pacific" strategy, the central policy plank of which is to contain China (whilst simultaneously confronting Russia on the other side of the world). When he took office Biden said "America's back!" Yes, it is – back to sabre-rattling and warmongering. And it wants its traditional allies (or satellites, as the West used to disparagingly call the Soviet Union's allies during the Cold War) all on board and on message.

New Zealand is very much back in bed with Uncle Sam, despite Jacinda repeatedly telling us that we have a "fiercely independent foreign policy". The facts say otherwise. So far in 2022, she has been in quick succession to the White House (the first such NZ PM's visit in years) and to the NATO Leaders' Summit in Madrid (the first ever such visit by an NZ PM). "Ardern now has the practical distinction of being the most pro-US Prime Minister since Sir Robert Muldoon" (Luke Malpass, *Stuff*, 4/7/22. What an appropriate story for the Fourth of July). Funnily enough, she has not described this achievement as her Government's "nuclear free moment".

We all should be very concerned at the dangerous foreign policy direction in which smiley, kind Jacinda is taking NZ. Our old mate, John Key, a glorified gambler by trade, had 50 cents each way on the US and China (one was for trade and the other for security). Not Jacinda - she's updated from "All the way

with LBJ" to "Way to go with Uncle Joe". And there is very little critical analysis of this. In the 80s we witnessed a similar middle class liberal reluctance to criticise a witty and charismatic Labour PM, because "we don't want to endanger the nuclear free policy".

There is currently a super power contest for ascendancy in the Pacific, being conducted between the US and China. This is not the place to go into details about that but one will suffice. President Biden announced the birth of a nebulous "informal alliance" called Partners in the Blue Pacific, comprising the US, UK, Australia, New Zealand and Japan (note that it has no actual Pacific Islands countries as members. It will be about them but not of them). Once again, NZ is filling its traditional role of running errands for the US in the Pacific.

The US is happy to dole out perks to its Five Eyes underlings. In 2022, it has added New Zealand to the list of countries granted an exemption from the requirement for our companies or individuals to have to jump through various bureaucratic hoops when seeking to invest in the US. To quote an NZ media analysis of this: "In a fact sheet outlining the rationale for the change of heart, the US Treasury Department cited New Zealand's 'intelligence-sharing relationship with the United States and its collective defence arrangement and cooperation with the United States' as among the factors which earned it an exemption.... While the addition of New Zealand showed some willingness to expand the benefits of the carve-outs to new investors, the fact the group remained restricted to Five Eyes members did not provide any clear sense of whether it would offer an exemption to countries outside of the intelligence pact".

So, Five Eyes is very, very important in setting the context for today's topic and, indeed, for the entire thrust of NZ's defence and foreign policy. I said I wouldn't go into detail about Rocket Lab but I'll give one relevant quote, from a 2020 *Press* article: "In a 2008 profile published in *Metro* magazine, (Chief Executive Officer and founder) Peter Beck ruled out military work when discussing if there were payloads Rocket Lab wouldn't carry".

"Of course, ... we said right from the beginning if it's involved in the military, we don't want anything to do with it. The military can be quite a tempting cherry because a lot of money gets poured into it, but we're about science, we're not about killing people', Beck is quoted as saying. His views have evolved, and he now believes military intelligence helps keep Kiwis safe".

"...Beck had a very different reply from 2008 when asked if he had any qualms about sending US spy satellites into space, given the intelligence they collect can be used in military operations. 'You also have to remember that intelligence keeps us safe. Unfortunately, there's a lot of bad actors in the world. I am a New Zealander, but you also have to understand that national security is a global thing. It's not a singular country's responsibility. New Zealand is part of the Five Eyes... it's all very well to criticise national security until the very day that you need it". So, Rocket Lab openly acknowledges the central importance of Five Eyes to its business as a contractor to the US military and spy agencies.

Play 1967 Outer Space Treaty clip here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mqVtkAFBpgY>

The Government's infatuation with Rocket Lab is taking NZ into some literally unearthly and legally dubious places. In mid-2021 NZ signed the Artemis Accords, which promotes the exploitation of the Moon and other space resources. To quote journalist Ollie Neas, an expert on the subject: "The legal status of space resources is contested. The world's main space agreement, the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, prohibits the 'national appropriation' of the Moon and other celestial bodies by any means. Some academics argue this rules out Moon mining for private profit. Others say it only precludes claims to land, not its resources".

"This uncertainty aside, in 2015 the US Congress passed a law allowing American companies to own and sell natural resources mined from space. In April 2020, the Trump Administration declared that the US doesn't view space as a 'global commons', denouncing the 1979 Moon Agreement, which sought to protect the Moon's resources as 'the common heritage' of mankind (although few states have signed up to it)".

"Announced shortly after Trump's declaration, the Artemis Accords – which are advanced directly with 'like-minded' nations, rather than through the UN – seek to shape international law in line with this

worldview, asserting that the extraction of space resources is not 'inherently' national appropriation under the Outer Space Treaty" (*Spinoff*, 3/6/21, Ollie Neas, <https://thespinoff.co.nz/politics/03-06-2021/how-nzs-new-deal-with-nasa-could-pave-the-way-for-moon-mining>).

"The New Zealand Space Agency believes its participation in the Artemis Accords – an international agreement to send people back to the Moon – will significantly boost the space sector. The Government signed up to the NASA accords in 2021, and New Zealand will play an important role in the project when Rocket Lab launches the CAPSTONE satellite to lunar orbit from Mahia Peninsula, likely in March (2022)".

"NASA's CAPSTONE, or Cislunar Autonomous Positioning System Technology Operations and Navigation Experiment satellite, will test the orbit planned to be used by a small space station that would act as a lunar gateway. The Space Agency noted that signing the Accords presented some risk to international relationships".

"The Accords may be viewed by some nations as an attempt to bypass the UN Committee on the Peaceful Use of Outer Space process and the UN treaty-making process", the Agency said" (*Stuff*, 6/1/22, Ben Strang, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/innovation/127435183/government-officials-expect-nz-moon-launch-to-create-huge-opportunities-in-space-sector>).

The reference to "some nations" is telling – neither Russia nor China has signed the Artemis Accords. But little old NZ has, jumping on board a Trumpian US outer space resource grab (one which has not been reversed by the Biden Administration), with a US company standing to financially benefit from its involvement using its NZ launch site.

"There are some obvious reasons that New Zealand might want to side with the United States in this debate. Our relationship with the superpower is critical for our space sector, particularly Rocket Lab, which has numerous US government contracts" (*North & South*, December 2021, "The Dark Side Of The Moon: Is New Zealand Lending Support To An Aggressive American Push To Commercialise Outer Space?", Kate Evans, <https://northandsouth.co.nz/2022/01/26/new-zealand-moon-artemis-accords/>). So, there you have it. And the answer to the question posed in the subtitle of that *North & South* article is: "yes".

To conclude: Five Eyes will only continue to get more important in the geopolitical game playing – indeed, it has been de facto expanded to include close cooperation with a number of other countries, such as Japan and Israel (in 2022 NZ signed up to an intelligence-sharing deal with Japan). What is NZ doing in it? If you are judged by the company you keep, then it doesn't reflect well on us. More and more, NZ is being sucked into the vortex that is the US empire, an empire that is increasingly using Five Eyes as yet another weapon in its quest to retain global domination. It is well beyond time for NZ to get out of it. There is no possibility of us having an "independent foreign policy" until that happens.

Helen Clark was the Labour Prime Minister who ordered the NZ military into Afghanistan. Her reaction to the Taliban victory in 2021 was to call it "a catastrophic failure of intelligence in Western foreign policy" (*Newshub*, 16/8/21, <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/world/2021/08/helen-clark-condemns-taliban-takeover-of-afghanistan-as-catastrophic-failure-of-intelligence-by-the-west.html>).

Yet, NZ is in the white Western world's self-proclaimed elite intelligence club, namely Five Eyes. Which proved to be absolutely useless in seeing what was going on in Afghanistan, a country which had been an adventure playground for Western spies for 20 years. So, why is New Zealand in Five Eyes, what use is it to us (or anyone else, for that matter)? Time for NZ to get out, time for Five Eyes to become four eyes.