

A MODERN, AGILE, HIGHLY ADAPTIVE, LIGHT FIGHTING FORCE

By the Chief of Army, Major General John Boswell

It is an incredible honour, after some 35 years of service, to have been appointed Chief of Army.

I am very clear in both my responsibilities as the Chief and the direction I wish to take our Army over the next three years. There will be challenges, no question, but I am absolutely convinced as to the strength of our organisation, the quality of our people, and that we will succeed.

The NZ Army is a fine institution. We have a long and distinguished history, and the men and women who make up today's Army (you) continue to add to that story through your service and your many fine achievements. We are valued by our government, the people of New Zealand, and also our partners and allies because what we do, domestically and in places far from New Zealand, is unique, it is tangible and it makes a difference. Your service is acknowledged and it is appreciated, of that be left in absolutely no doubt. I take great pride in being part of that story, and of that service.

Already, many people are asking me what my vision is, what difference will I make? Let me share my thinking with you.

The Government has recently released its Strategic Defence Policy Statement which makes it very clear what is required of us. "The core task of the Defence Force is to conduct military operations, in particular combat operations.....well trained and operationally prepared ground forces provide effective land combat capabilities that the government can deploy for a wide range of tasks."

A couple of key, and quite obvious takeaways for me from these statements is that whilst we must retain the ability to operate across the spectrum of military operations our ability to prosecute land combat operations is non-negotiable. Equally clear is that we must continue to provide government with these land capabilities in an increasingly complex environment. An environment where land, air, sea, space and cyber are becoming more integrated, technological change is not only permanent but escalating, and the demand to undertake population-based operations against a well-concealed, highly capable adversary, is increasing.

To position ourselves to meet the demands placed on us by government and remain operationally effective, both now and in the future, we must become a modern, agile, highly adaptive, light fighting force.

Our current modernisation programme, which was a real focus of my predecessor, is one that I both fully support and will look to enhance. The

Network Enabled Army, Protected Mobility and Soldier Modernisation capability programmes are well established, future focused, and will significantly enhance the combat capabilities of our Army. As the demand on us to undertake population-based operations increases we need however, to give greater thought to the tactics, skills and equipment needed by our force to operate effectively in the future urban environment. Army will shortly stand up a project to examine this with a view to significantly enhancing our urban capability. We also need to better understand how we integrate the land force into, not only a joint and multi-national environment, but with the many other government agencies that we will operate alongside in the future battlespace. The establishment of the Mission Command Training Centre is a great start to allow us to do this – we now need to give the work of this unit real momentum.

Our force must be agile – of both thought and action. We must ensure we provide our soldiers, at all levels, with the attributes required to think smart, fight smart. Our Commanders, regardless of rank or appointment, all require the ability to cope with the speed and vast quantities of information that will be prevalent in the future operating environment, and they must have the decision making ability to lead effectively in that environment. As a force it is essential that we have the inherent versatility and flexibility to respond to situations, across the spectrum of conflict. Somewhat ironically, in an environment that will be more connected, the practise of mission command will become more important not less. It is only through the provision of a top-down vision, effective low level planning and decentralised decision making that we will enable subordinates to respond in a timely and effective manner to the challenging and chaotic situations they will face in the future – I am acutely aware that mission command starts with me however, it must flow throughout the Army.

Our Army must be flexible, rapidly scalable, and able to adapt to a situation in order to both understand it and generate the desired effects. We will retain our current structure based around 1 (NZ) Brigade however, we must become comfortable in being task organised as many times as needed to match the emerging character of a conflict or crises, to achieve mission success. One of our strengths must become our 'plug and play' mentality using the capability bricks and mission specific task force approach to operations.

Finally, the New Zealand Army is, and always will be, a light fighting force. A fact which shapes both how we structure and equip ourselves, and how we fight. Light infantry, light armoured, light artillery, in conjunction with our Special Forces, will continue to provide the core of our Army's combat capability. These force elements must be supported by agile and responsive combat support and sustainment forces that, in their



own right, are well prepared, technologically advanced and capable of operating in an austere environment. Our warfighting philosophy must be one that exploits the battlefield conditions that best suit a light fighting force (principally restricted and complex terrain); maximises its inherent strengths of flexibility, self-sufficiency and manoeuvrability; and advocates the initiative-based tactics required to enable both operational versatility and speed of action. Presently, this philosophy is captured in our manoeuvrist approach to warfare – an approach that remains relevant to today's fight, but will it do so in the future?

Much will support, will enable, the achievement of these outcomes. We will remain fully cognisant of the support provided by the families of our soldiers, always looking for opportunities to improve the support we provide to them – our families are key to our operational success. We have a collective responsibility to ensure we continue to recruit, train and retain the right people with the right skills. We need to have a hard look at our infrastructure and ensure that we adopt a footprint in New Zealand that is both fit for purpose and future proofed. Operationally, we will continue to be guided by the need to be expeditionary, interoperable, integrated and we will continue to examine concepts such as intelligence-led, information-enabled manoeuvre, precision strike (and there are many others) to determine their applicability to our Army, and how we can best employ them.

There is no question that achieving my vision of a *modern, agile, highly adaptive, light fighting force*, while at the same time continuing to both generate capability and commit to operations, will challenge us. It will require careful planning and a clear prioritisation of effort across Army. It will also require that we all buy into this direction, and collectively we work towards the outcomes I've described above.

So, what's next? The team at Army General Staff are currently refreshing, with inputs from across the Army, our strategy for 2025 to ensure alignment with the vision I've outlined above. Towards the end of this year it is my intention to visit all our camps and communicate to you our draft plan for the future – this will be your opportunity to not only gain an understanding of where we are heading (and why) but to provide any final inputs.

Post that, we crack on.

