

COMMENT FROM THE EDITORS

Rouben Azizian and John Battersby

The successful launch of the *National Security Journal* last year was not without doubts about its sustainability in the highly competitive academic journal market and its relevance for the broad audience of security analysts, practitioners and students. There were also some concerns expressed at the time about the ability to attract contributors from a wide range of institutions and backgrounds as well as from both New Zealand and overseas. We however believed the time was right and the audience did exist for a new platform to discuss national security issues. Our intention was not to create a purely academic journal, but rather to enrich solid and emerging academic expertise with first-hand experience of practitioners who offer unique insights in those topics that only they know how to articulate from an insider perspective. We are especially proud to introduce promising student work which provides a fresh perspective on contemporary security. The feedback that we have received so far, from across the government sector in New Zealand and from around the globe, confirms that our readers see the benefit of this synergy of diverse and inclusive expertise and ideas. The other positive sign is that more contributions are being offered to us from international experts for upcoming issues. This issue innovates a little more also, introducing book reviews into our format.

This issue, like the one before, offers perspectives on a wide range of security issues. Reuben Steff provides an in-depth analysis of the North Korean problem, explaining the historical context to the current situation on the Korean peninsula and, importantly, the motives driving the North Korean position. The presentation of North Korean motives genuinely assists in understanding Kim Jong Un's interests and intentions and their likely implications for the region as well as New Zealand's national security. This insight is useful and timely.

Carl Bradley's article looks at New Zealand's gangs from a broad cultural perspective. Gang numbers in this country have been increasing in recent times, boosted by deportations from Australia who arrive here with established Australian underworld connections. Bradley argues, that "increased economic inequality will see gang membership continue to rise" and moves by some groups to position themselves to further control illicit, and perhaps certain licit, commodities. The socio-economic driver for gang membership is

important for the New Zealand government to take note of, as COVID-19 leaves the country's economy with high unemployment, high costs of living, a continuing housing crisis, and increasing gang recruitment in prisons.

Holly Vandenberg and Wil Hoverd discuss the use (and misuse) of the terms 'extremism' and 'terrorism', comparing the use of these terms before and after the 15 March 2019 attacks in Christchurch. The authors argue there is an inconsistency in the use of the terms which indicates confusion and directly influences government and security agencies, as well as the media and general population. Vandenberg and Hoverd remind us of the importance of definitional accuracy and consistency and challenge not just practitioners, but academics as well, to tighten their diction here.

Olivia Cleaver and Germana Nicklin's article on the use of 'false personas' in social media intelligence collection discusses the ambiguity of private information on publicly available social media systems. There is social license to use these systems in intelligence collection, but the authors shed light on an area which has so far defied legislators' abilities to clarify the public interest, the right to privacy, and appropriateness of covert use of this information. The authors caveat their conclusions, and call for more research to be done, but they clearly focus some disciplined attention on false persona use, who uses it and why.

John Battersby, Rhys Ball and Nick Nelson challenge New Zealand's recently published "Countering terrorism and violent extremism national strategy" as not hitting the mark that it should. The authors take readers briefly over what a strategy should be, then review the practice of the Five Eyes partner nations and their CT strategy documents. A number of the topics cited in the national strategy are discussed in some detail, and the authors draw out the complexity of concepts such as 'social inclusion' and ask the reader to think about whether the 'gun buy-back' or the Christchurch Call should be considered aspects of a national CT approach. Overall, it is contended that New Zealand's strategy is all too brief and compares unfavourably with more comprehensive and explained strategies of our security partners. The broader formation, back-ground research and compilation of strategy documents is an area where academics and practitioners could work much more closely together.

Finally, *National Security Journal* is privileged to have Yevgeny Zvedre's article on space weaponisation – a Russian perspective. Zvedre is a former career diplomat with the Soviet and Russian foreign services of 35 years and an experienced Arms Control negotiator. His article considers the threat of space weaponisation, previous approaches to its control, and the current situation as it continues to evolve. This article benefits from being from 'the other side' of what we would normally see though the Western media and government reports. The implications of a space arms race are alarming, and the author's call for increased diplomatic initiatives to keep space free of weapons is genuine, urgent and well made.

The reader will no doubt notice that this issue of the journal does not include articles focusing on the impact of COVID-19, although the problem is briefly addressed in some of the articles. This is not to suggest that COVID-19 is not or should not be considered as an important national security challenge. On the contrary, COVID-19 is a powerful reminder that national security continues to evolve and transform reflecting its increasingly multifaceted and interdependent nature. We believe it is however too early at this stage to comprehend the long-term strategic consequences of a health crisis that has already transcended most of the areas of national and international security, such as human and economic security, border security, social and political stability, geopolitical rivalry and multilateral cooperation. It remains to be seen if COVID-19 will lead to more confrontation along national and international lines or prompt better mutual understanding and collaboration. There are clearly signs of both impacts happening at the same time.

On the one hand, we are witnessing divisive, world-wide politicisation of the COVID-19, with New Zealand not being an exception, as well disturbing examples of geopolitical opportunism. COVID-19 has polarised even more the domestic scene in the United States questioning the country's ability to provide reliable international leadership while China's increased assertiveness vis-a-vis Hong Kong and its land and maritime neighbours has raised significant regional alarm bells. At this critical security juncture, multilateral organisations which could and should be playing a crucial constructive role are unfortunately undermined by narrow national or ideological interests.

On the positive side, there are encouraging examples of international collaboration in developing the very much needed vaccine. There is also a promising broadening of the domain of national security actors with the health sector finally being recognised as a central and not peripheral part of the domain. The crisis has also become an opportunity for smaller nations who have been considered geopolitical lightweights before, to become role models and leaders in demonstrating effective response to the COVID challenge and thus enhance their international visibility and influence.

For the optimists, thanks to the coronavirus we may be witnessing a transition into an era when national security capability is measured not so much by the number of nuclear warheads or the size of armies but by the robustness of inclusive, integrated and flexible national security systems. And perhaps the international security system itself will be incrementally moving away from the traditional dominance of larger nations towards a more balanced and less confrontational new world. This optimism is understandably very shaky as the temptation to return to business as usual could, as has happened many times before in human history, prevail over common sense. The *National Security Journal* team will continue to observe the controversial impact of COVID-19 and seek contributions that provide an in-depth analysis of its many consequences relevant for national security.