

# New Zealand 'uncomfortable' with expanding Five Eyes' remit, says foreign minister

[theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/19/new-zealand-uncomfortable-with-expanding-five-eyes-remit-says-foreign-minister](https://theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/19/new-zealand-uncomfortable-with-expanding-five-eyes-remit-says-foreign-minister)

19 April 2021



New Zealand's foreign minister, Nanaia Mahuta, says her country won't provoke or engage with China through the Five Eyes alliance aside from on intelligence matters, in a major accommodation of Chinese concerns.

The Five Eyes alliance is a network of five like-minded countries – the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand – that share security-related intelligence.

Recently, members have invoked the alliance on broader matters, such as Hong Kong's creep towards authoritarianism or the mistreatment of Uyghurs in China's Xinjiang region.

This has infuriated Chinese officials, who see the group as attempting to curtail China's sovereignty.

**█** New Zealand must build bridges with China but show independent foreign policy  
Bryce Edwards



[Read more](#)

Last year, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian responded with anger to a statement about Hong Kong, saying “if they dare to harm China’s sovereignty, security and development interests, they should beware of their eyes being poked and blinded”.

Speaking at a meeting of the New Zealand China Council on Monday, Mahuta said New Zealand did not want to see a widening of the scope of the intelligence network. “We are uncomfortable with expanding the remit of the Five Eyes,” she said. “We would much rather prefer to look for multilateral opportunities to express our interests.”

Mahuta, giving just the second major policy address of her tenure, said the move was a departure from the approach of her predecessor, veteran Winston Peters.

Peters was foreign minister during Jacinda Ardern’s first term, when Labour relied upon his populist New Zealand First party to govern. Free of that coalition, Mahuta and Labour have changed their approach.

“New Zealand has been very clear, certainly in this term since we’ve held the portfolio, not to invoke the Five Eyes as the first point of contact on messaging out on a range of issues,” she said.

“They really exist outside of the remit of the Five Eyes. We don’t favour that type of approach and have expressed that to Five Eyes partners.”

The move confirms New Zealand’s independent streak on foreign policy. In recent decades, Aotearoa has walked a different path to Australia, with fewer formal ties to the United States and a more comfortable working relationship with China.

While the Five Eyes pledge on Monday was an accommodation to its biggest trading partner, some of Mahuta’s other comments were less amenable.

She said New Zealand was seeking to lessen its trade reliance on any one country, which can only be interpreted as diversifying beyond China, its biggest trade partner.

Mahuta also expressed concerns around indebtedness in the Pacific, where some nations have agreed to loans from China in order to build much-needed infrastructure.

“It’s no secret there’s a significant level of economic vulnerability across the Pacific,” she said. “New Zealand certainly invests in the Pacific ... by way of grants, not loans.

“If we’re really focused on regional stability and opportunity we need to tackle this particular challenge. I hope that conversation can take place with those who seek to invest in the region.”

[Australia and New Zealand welcome sanctions on China over Uighur abuses but impose none of their own](#)



[Read more](#)

She also said New Zealand had, and would continue, to raise concerns privately with China, emphasising that Wellington wanted to take a “predictable approach, through diplomacy and dialogue.”



“Matters such as human rights should be approached in a consistent, country agnostic manner. We will not ignore the severity and impact of any particular country’s actions if they conflict with our longstanding and formal commitment to universal human rights,” she said.

“Sometimes we will therefore find it necessary to speak out publicly on issues, like we have on developments in Hong Kong, the treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, and cyber incidents.

“At times we will do this in association with others that share our views and sometimes we will act alone. In each case we make our decisions independently, informed by our values and our own assessment of New Zealand’s interests.”

---

... we have a small favour to ask. You’ve read

in the last year. And you’re not alone; through these turbulent and challenging times, millions rely on the Guardian for independent journalism that stands for truth and integrity. Readers chose to support us financially more than 1.5 million times in 2020, joining existing supporters in 180 countries.

With your help, we will continue to provide high-impact reporting that can counter misinformation and offer an authoritative, trustworthy source of news for everyone. With no shareholders or billionaire owner, we set our own agenda and provide truth-seeking journalism that’s free from commercial and political influence. When it’s never mattered more, we can investigate and challenge without fear or favour.

Unlike many others, we have maintained our choice: to keep Guardian journalism open for all readers, regardless of where they live or what they can afford to pay. We do this because we believe in information equality, where everyone deserves to read accurate news and thoughtful analysis. Greater numbers of people are staying well-informed on world events, and being inspired to take meaningful action.

We aim to offer readers a comprehensive, international perspective on critical events shaping our world – from the Black Lives Matter movement, to the new American administration, Brexit, and the world's slow emergence from a global pandemic. We are committed to upholding our reputation for urgent, powerful reporting on the climate emergency, and made the decision to reject advertising from fossil fuel companies, divest from the oil and gas industries, and set a course to achieve net zero emissions by 2030.

If there were ever a time to join us, it is now. You can power Guardian journalism and help sustain our future. **Support the Guardian from as little as \$1 – it only takes a minute. If you can, please consider supporting us with a regular amount each month. Thank you.**

[Support the Guardian](#) →

