United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 17, 2026

The Honorable Troy E. Meink
Secretary of the Air Force
Office of the Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20330

Dear Secretary Meink,

We write to express our continued support for the U.S. Space Force and U.S. Space Command's efforts to collaborate with allies and partners across the Indo-Pacific and to request your consideration of additional steps to improve such efforts with New Zealand, a key Five Eyes partner, where doing so advances U.S. national security interests and strengthens collective capability. We believe these efforts would complement existing U.S. exchange and interoperability arrangements with Australia and other Five Eyes members to enhance regional deterrence and space-related collaboration.

During retired Chief of Space Operations General Chance B. Saltzman's May 2026 visit to New Zealand, he met with officials from the Ministry of Defence and the Royal New Zealand Air Force's No. 62 Squadron, New Zealand's only dedicated space unit. The No. 62 Squadron plays a crucial role in the U.S. Space Command's Joint Commercial Operations (JCO) cells, serving as the Pacific Cell Lead and supporting partner nation training around the world. The Squadron's participation in the JCO enables New Zealand to build its own space domain awareness capabilities, particularly with regard to satellite tracking.

Additionally, the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) works through the U.S.-led Combined Space Operations initiative to protect shared space interests from disruption, denial, or destruction, and promote responsible behavior in the domain.[1] The NZDF has also launched experimental payloads into orbit on U.S. satellites, while Prime Minister Christopher Luxon established a dedicated ministerial position for space in 2023.[2]

These efforts demonstrate the seriousness with which New Zealand's government and the NZDF approach space. Further maturation of New Zealand's space program and additional investment in capabilities that complement U.S. and allied efforts would advance U.S. national security objectives, helping ensure allied and partner space superiority by providing opportunities for additional satellite tracking, space surveillance, missile coverage, and communications redundancies. Moreover, the relatively small scale of New Zealand's military space bureaucracy — coupled with the country's geographically advantageous launch and operational environments and growing commercial space sector — offers considerable avenues for mutual partnership and opportunities to innovate.

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[1] https://www.desc.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/DocumentLibrary/NZDF-Annual-Report-2025.pdf
[2] https://www.nzdf.mil.nz/media-centre/news/nzdf-tests-space-hardware-after-successful-satellite-launch; and https://www.nzdf.mil.nz/media-centre/news/nzdf-celebrates-successful-launch-of-a-second-satellite-payload

As Senators representing states with U.S. Space Force missions or other space-related equities, we share a deep appreciation of the extent and complexity of securing the space domain. For this reason, we believe in the necessity of having ready and capable allies and partners. Increased interactions, particularly through U.S.-New Zealand exchanges, present an opportunity to enhance both countries' capabilities in space.[3] Where such arrangements address identified operational needs and provide reciprocal benefits, expanding space-related exchanges between the NZDF and our Joint Force could strengthen interoperability and enhance collective deterrence across the Indo-Pacific.

We stand ready to support efforts, as appropriate, that strengthen U.S. capabilities and enable greater contributions from Indo-Pacific allies and partners. We look forward to engaging further.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

Eric S. Schmitt
United States Senator

Kevin Cramer
United States Senator

John Hickenlooper
United States Senator

Pete Ricketts
United States Senator

Deb Fischer
United States Senator

Andy Kim
United States Senator

Michael S. Lee
United States Senator

Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator

[3] https://www.buckley.spaceforce.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/1965733/a-smoother-transition-the-allied-family-integration-program/