

New Zealand signs NATO partnership deal

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22 June 2012

New Zealand's National Party-led government has signed an agreement with NATO to boost cooperation in a range of areas, including anti-terrorism, military training, disaster relief and intelligence. The Individual Partnership Cooperation Programme was signed in Brussels on June 4 by Prime Minister John Key and NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

The agreement establishes the formal basis for NZ troops to operate as part of future NATO-led wars. Key declared it would offer New Zealand "engagement with NATO as it moves to tackle emerging security challenges." According to Rasmussen, such partnerships are "essential to NATO's success". The organisation wanted to be more closely connected with countries "that are also willing to contribute to global security, where we all have a stake." New Zealand is simultaneously seeking international support for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council in 2015-16.

The signing comes as the US, its NATO allies in Europe and the Gulf monarchies are threatening military interventions against Syria and Iran. New Zealand is positioning itself to be part of any military aggression against Syria, or any other country singled out for hostilities or "regime change". While the agreement is non-binding, according to Key, it will be used to maintain "ongoing political and operational discussions and underpin any future co-operation with NATO where it is mutually desirable."

The agreement establishes another means for the New Zealand government to justify military involvement in wars instigated by the US and major European powers. The previous Labour government sent New Zealand troops to Afghanistan and Iraq by invoking UN Security Council resolutions. Now Wellington could

join NATO-led wars without the fig leaf of UN backing.

Rasmussen noted New Zealand's record in supporting the military occupation of Afghanistan. He told Key: "Your troops do an outstanding job. I pay tribute to their courage, their professionalism, and their sacrifice. They are making a real difference in the interest of our shared security—and I thank New Zealand for that."

Rasmussen noted that the NATO summit in Chicago last month had sent out "a clear signal to the Afghan people and the region that we will continue to stay committed beyond 2014." The summit, which New Zealand attended, formally ratified the Obama administration's plans for a phased drawdown of combat forces, while laying the groundwork for a continued US-led military presence to 2024 and beyond.

Key said the relationship between New Zealand and NATO had "developed considerably" over the past 10 years, mainly through involvement in the NATO-led ISAF mission in Afghanistan. The Helen Clark-led Labour-Alliance government was among the first in the world to commit troops—elite special forces—to the US initiated invasion.

The SAS has carried out four duty rotations during the last nine years. Its strategic and operational value was signified by a rare White House citation awarded to the unit by former president George W. Bush in 2004. New Zealand governments have always presented these operations as "peacekeeping," but the character of the SAS mission was exposed last year when evidence emerged implicating it in war crimes. SAS troops were accused of handing over Afghani

detainees to US and Afghan forces who tortured them. A separate NZ army contingent in Bamiyan province is due to pull out its remaining 200 troops next year.

On a trip to Wellington in April, the commander of NATO's military forces, Admiral James Stavridis, said the SAS contingent was no longer needed in Afghanistan, but could be deployed to help fight "global threats" elsewhere in the future. He told One News that with Western intervention in "places like Syria" now a "real possibility", he was keen to keep New Zealand "on-side". Six NZ Defence Force personnel were sent to Syria last month to join the UN Supervision Mission.

The NZ-NATO agreement reinforces New Zealand's military relationships with the major imperialist powers after a 25-year hiatus. In 1984, the 40-year-old ANZUS Treaty with Australia and the US was scuttled after David Lange's Labour government initiated its anti-nuclear policy, which effectively banned US warships from New Zealand ports. The following year, the French secret service blew up the Greenpeace ship, the Rainbow Warrior, as it was docked in Auckland Harbour while preparing to protest French nuclear tests at Mururoa Atoll. This state-sponsored terrorism seriously undermined relations between New Zealand and France.

New Zealand imperialism has increasingly required the support of Australia and the US to maintain its position in the southwest Pacific. In return, New Zealand governments have taken part in US- and Australian-led military interventions. In 1994 a 250-strong NZ rifle company was attached to a British regiment in Bosnia in the first deployment of combat troops since the Vietnam War. In 1999, NZ troops took part in the Australian-led occupation of East Timor. At its peak, the New Zealand Defence Force had 1,100 personnel in Timor—its largest overseas military deployment after the Korean War. NZ soldiers also joined the Australian-led RAMSI takeover of Solomon Islands in 2003.

The involvement of NZ troops in the US occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq paved the way for the "normalisation" of ties with the US. The last Labour

government, with the support of the Alliance and the Greens, played a central role. During visits to Washington in 2002 and 2007, Prime Minister Helen Clark ingratiated herself with the Bush administration and aligned her government with the bogus US "war on terror".

The Key government has continued to develop closer military ties with the US. The aggressive turn by the Obama administration to counter Chinese influence in the Asia Pacific prompted the signing of the Wellington Declaration by Secretary of State Hilary Clinton during a visit to New Zealand in 2010. The resumption of direct military contact, including exercises, joint training and officer exchanges, began last month with 70 US military personnel arriving to conduct exercises with the NZ army. This month sees a fortnight of joint NZ-US commemorative events to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the stationing of 45,000 US Marines in New Zealand in 1942, during the Second World War.



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