

# New Zealand: Anzac Day glorifies imperialist war

Tom Peters  
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Anzac Day dawn services throughout New Zealand on April 25 were used by the media and political establishment to glorify militarism and war.

The annual public holiday commemorates the landing of Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) troops on the Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey in 1915. Military-led dawn services are held at war memorials throughout both countries and at Gallipoli. The Australian and New Zealand governments have sought to give the day increased prominence in recent years and have spent hundreds of millions of dollars on events and monuments linked with the centenary of World War I.

Thousands of people attend Anzac services to remember relatives who died in World Wars I and II. For the government, however, the purpose of the day is to inspire nationalism and unquestioning respect for the military, particularly among young people.

This year Anzac Day took place against the backdrop of the growing danger of a Third World War brought about by the US military build-up and belligerent threats against Syria, North Korea, Russia and China. This immense threat to the entire world was not mentioned in any of the speeches or editorials in New Zealand.

In a video message on April 24, Prime Minister Bill English called on people to attend Anzac services in order to “acknowledge the price that so many New Zealanders paid for our freedom and that is they gave their lives to preserve it.” He stressed this was “not just in Gallipoli, but in the many wars and campaigns that New Zealanders have been involved in over the last 100 years or so,” including those currently serving.

Governor-General Patsy Reddy echoed this theme. She declared at a service in Wellington that in addition to the two world wars, “Anzac Day is a time to honour

the New Zealanders who served in ... Malaya, Korea, Vietnam and more recent conflicts.” She continued: “New Zealand has played a proud role in helping to uphold the rule of law and respect for human rights and freedoms wherever in the world these values are under threat. Whether providing military observer services in the Republic of South Sudan or training Iraqi troops for their war against ISIL [Islamic State].”

In fact, these wars and interventions, in which millions of people have been killed, have had nothing to do with defending freedom or “human rights.” In each case New Zealand has served as a junior imperialist partner of either the British Empire or the United States, as they fought for control over oppressed countries.

Media coverage echoed the need for young people to “sacrifice” during wartime. A *New Zealand Herald* editorial absurdly declared that previous wars “have left an enduring peace,” while at the same time warning that “selfless national service” could still be required in future. The newspaper called on readers to “resolve that they, too, would answer [the nation’s] call.”

The *Dominion Post* emphasised the attendance at the Wellington dawn service of Corporal Willie Apiata, whom it described as a “war hero.” Apiata was a member of the elite Special Air Service (SAS) and was awarded a Victoria Cross medal for fighting during the neo-colonial war in Afghanistan. Opposition Labour Party leader Andrew Little posted a photograph of himself posing with Apiata on Facebook.

The recently published *Hit and Run* contains evidence that the NZ SAS committed war crimes in Afghanistan. In 2010 the elite troops carried out an assault on a defenseless village that killed six people, including a three-year-old girl, and wounded 15 others (see: “Book details killing of Afghan civilians in New

Zealand SAS raid”).

The media gave considerable attention to New Zealand First Party chief of staff David Broome and his 12-year-old son James Broome-Isa, who were filmed berating protesters from the pacifist group Peace Action Wellington. The group laid a wreath at the Wellington cenotaph for victims of the NZ SAS raid. James shouted that the protesters were “wrong, wrong, wrong” and “so inappropriate, I cannot believe this.”

Prime Minister English sought to downplay the incident, telling Newshub it was a “minor” protest and “within the law.” The news outlet, however, declared that it had sparked a “national debate” over whether people should be allowed to protest on Anzac Day. Newsreader Duncan Garner praised James Broome-Isa as “articulate” and “brave” for having “stood up to the protesters.”

New Zealand First leader Winston Peters and defence spokesman Ron Mark (a former army officer) denounced the protest as “disrespectful” and “inappropriate.”

Barry Clark, president of the Returned and Services’ Association, also hailed the 12-year-old, saying he represented “young people, who we’re seeing more and more of at our Anzac Day services.”

The government has made a major effort to promote war to children, through museum exhibitions and the publication of books such as *ANZAC Heroes*. Army recruiters have been taking military assault rifles into primary schools in a program purportedly teaching 9- to 13-year-old children about “leadership and weaponry.”

The Broome family does not speak for the working class and youth, who are overwhelmingly anti-war. New Zealand First is a right-wing nationalist party that has called for greater military spending to prepare for war with China, and restrictions on Muslim and Asian immigrants. The party has also promoted a scheme to encourage unemployed teenagers to undergo army training, which would be a step toward conscription should a war break out.

The Labour Party and the Greens, which will both contest this year’s election in a de facto alliance with NZ First, have remained silent on the party’s outburst against critics of the SAS.

The ruling elite is highly sensitive to any criticism of the military because it is preparing to drag the country

into future wars. Already the government has sent troops to Iraq and said it would “consider” sending troops to Syria if asked.

Coinciding with Anzac Day, a meeting of the US-led Five Eyes alliance was held over several days in the New Zealand resort town of Queenstown. The alliance includes the spy agencies of the US, Canada, Britain, Australia and New Zealand. No details of the secret discussions were released, but FBI director James Comey and CIA director Mike Pompeo were reported to be in attendance.

English told Radio NZ on April 24 the meeting would discuss “all the current issues” and he expected this would include North Korea. A day earlier, Defence Minister Gerry Brownlee lashed out at the North Korean regime, telling TVNZ it had “evil intent” and had made “outrageous threats” against the US and Australia.

Brownlee has since been elevated to foreign minister in a cabinet reshuffle. *New Zealand Herald* columnist Fran O’Sullivan approved Brownlee’s promotion, declaring he had “one important attribute that most foreign affairs mandarins lack. He gets the Donald Trump phenomenon.” The Trump administration has repeatedly threatened to attack North Korea, risking a nuclear war.

It is in this context that politicians and the media are calling on young people to prepare to “sacrifice” for the nation, and are seeking to demonise dissent.



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