

After fascist terror attack, New Zealand and Australia stoke tensions with Turkey

Tom Peters**25 March 2019**

Last week the Australian and New Zealand governments furiously attacked Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan over his response to the March 15 Christchurch mass shooting, in which Australian fascist terrorist Brenton Tarrant killed 50 people in two mosques.

Addressing a political rally on March 18, Erdogan likened Tarrant's white supremacist ideology to the anti-Muslim views of Allied soldiers sent to fight the Ottoman Empire in World War I. His comments prompted immediate, belligerent denunciations from the Australian and New Zealand political establishment and media, which glorifies the role of the Anzacs (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) in WWI, especially the disastrous attempted invasion of Turkey via the Gallipoli Peninsula in the Ottoman Empire in 1915.

The Anzac "legend" is a central ideological tool used by Australia and New Zealand's ruling elite to promote patriotism and militarism particularly amid acute social tensions over poverty and inequality. It has helped create the environment that fuelled the growth of fascist groups and led to the Christchurch massacre.

Speaking to a crowd near the Gallipoli battle site, Erdogan declared that Tarrant's shooting "wasn't an individual attack, this is organised," contradicting claims by New Zealand police that Tarrant acted alone. Turkish authorities believe he was backed by a well-resourced organisation and may have been planning terror attacks in Turkey, which he visited twice in 2016.

Referring to the defeat of the Allies at Gallipoli, Erdogan said anyone travelling to Turkey with views like Tarrant's would face the same fate. "Your grandparents came, some of them returned in coffins," he declared. "If you come again like your grandfathers, be sure that you will be gone like your grandfathers."

At several campaign rallies, Erdogan has shown excerpts of Tarrant's video of his horrific attack, in which three Turkish nationals were injured. He demanded that New Zealand bring back the death penalty for Tarrant, otherwise Turkey would "make [him] pay one way or another."

Erdogan's statements are aimed at whipping up Turkish nationalism in order to divert growing working-class anger over social inequality in the lead-up to the March 31 local elections. The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) is desperately trying to cling to power amid an economic crisis and worsening tensions with the US, which backed a failed coup against Erdogan in 2016.

The outraged response to Erdogan from Canberra and Wellington, however, is just as reactionary. Neither government condemned or sought to differentiate themselves from Tarrant's call in his manifesto for Christians to reconquer Istanbul and slaughter Turks, or his threat to "kill Erdogan." Instead, they sought to whip up nationalist sentiment against Turkey and defend the Anzacs' World War I campaign.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, in a bellicose rant, called Erdogan's speech "highly offensive to Australians and highly reckless in this very sensitive environment," and an "insult [to] the memory of our Anzacs."

After speaking with the Turkish ambassador, Morrison told the media he was not satisfied with the "excuse" that Erdogan was engaged in a heated political campaign. He declared that "all options are now on the table," including expelling Turkish diplomats.

In a highly provocative move, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern sent Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters to Turkey to "confront" Erdogan.

Peters told journalists that Erdogan's speech "imperils the safety of the New Zealand people," even though the Turkish president did not threaten peaceful tourists, only violent anti-Muslim extremists like Tarrant.

Peters leads the right-wing nationalist New Zealand First Party, which has a major role in the Labour Party-led coalition government. It has repeatedly scapegoated immigrants for social inequality, low wages and unemployment and demonised Muslims as potential terrorists. Before departing, Peters told journalists he would not retract his previous anti-Muslim statements.

By Thursday Australia and New Zealand had received an "assurance" from Ankara that travellers would be welcome at Gallipoli on Anzac Day. Morrison said he was pleased Erdogan has "moderated" his rhetoric. The *Australian*, however, reported that some in the government "feared [Erdogan's remarks] could... unleash a wave of jihadist attacks on Australians at home and abroad."

Anzac Day, the April 25 holiday in Australia and New Zealand, marks the landing of soldiers at Gallipoli in 1915. The ruling class in both countries encourages citizens to make patriotic "pilgrimages" to Gallipoli on the day.

The Gallipoli campaign was a disastrous attempt by the Allies to seize control of the strategic Dardanelles shipping lanes. The battle cost the lives of 8,700 Australians, 2,700 New Zealanders, more than 21,000 British, 10,000 French, 1,300 Indians and more than 86,000 Ottoman soldiers. A further 262,014 people were wounded on all sides. After the war the defeated Ottoman Empire was broken up and its Middle Eastern territories divided between Britain and France.

The slaughter at Gallipoli was part of an imperialist war aimed at re-dividing the world between the major imperialist countries. Australia and New Zealand joined the war as part of the British Empire and as minor imperialist powers in their own right seeking a share of the plunder, especially of colonies in the Pacific region.

The battle is promoted by the Australian and New Zealand ruling class as a pivotal moment in the forging of national identity and militarist values. During the 2014-2018 centenary of World War I, governments in both countries poured hundreds of millions of dollars into museums, monuments, films, books and events glorifying the Anzacs, in order to inculcate respect for the military and prepare young people, in particular, for

future imperialist wars.

Anzac Day ceremonies promote not only WWI and WWII, but all wars Australia and New Zealand have joined, including the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the US-led wars aimed at controlling resource-rich Iraq and Afghanistan, fought on the pretext of defeating terrorism.

Anzac mythology has always falsely justified the imperialist war as the defence of democracy and "our way of life." Now, however, it is increasingly portrayed as a fight against Islamic "extremism" and a precursor to today's wars. John King, chairman of the Returned Services League (RSL), told the *Australian* on Thursday that Erdogan's speeches were "the sort of hate and extremism" Australian soldiers had fought against.

Damien Fenton, who wrote a state-funded book praising New Zealand's World War I campaign, has described the war against the Ottoman Empire as "New Zealand's first taste of jihad." A *Southland Times* article in October 2014 reported: "Fenton says it is 'chilling' to reflect that Gallipoli was the cradle for the jihad the world is experiencing right now."

The Australian far-right group United Patriots Front, which was a major influence on Tarrant, heavily promotes Anzac Day and portrays the Gallipoli campaign as part of an ongoing fight against Islam.

The fascist who carried out the March 15 attacks did not develop his views in a vacuum. He grew up during a quarter century of constant wars in the Middle East, accompanied by anti-Muslim racism and militarist propaganda, including the historical lies surrounding the Anzac legend.



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