

New Zealand government denounces China's condemnation of Australian war crimes

Tom Peters

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New Zealand's Labour Party government has joined the Australian ruling elite's efforts to whip up nationalist, anti-Chinese hysteria over a tweet condemning Australian war crimes in Afghanistan.

Zhao Lijian, deputy director of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Information Department, tweeted on November 30: "Shocked by murder of Afghan civilians & prisoners by Australian soldiers. We strongly condemn such acts, & call for holding them accountable." This was accompanied by an image, designed by a graphic artist, of an Australian soldier holding a knife to an Afghan child's throat.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted, there was nothing controversial, or even debatable, about the tweet. It referenced substantiated allegations of war crimes by Australian special forces (SAS) which have shocked millions of people internationally.

The Brereton inquiry, initiated by the Australian military, has revealed that special forces murdered at least 39 unarmed Afghans between 2009 and 2013, including children. No one has yet been charged for these crimes. The Brereton report seeks to protect high-ranking commanders, absurdly claiming that they knew nothing about the routine killing of civilians and prisoners.

Successive Labor Party and Liberal-National Party governments are also protected despite joining the illegal war aimed at securing US imperialist domination over the strategically important region. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have resulted in well over a million deaths and turned millions of people into refugees.

Australia's political and media establishment has reacted with far more outrage to Zhao's tweet than to the atrocities committed by the SAS. Prime Minister Scott Morrison demanded that Beijing apologise for "a false image and a terrible slur on our great defence forces."

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, along with the United States and French governments,

immediately supported Morrison. Ardern told the media Zhao's tweet "wasn't factual, it wasn't correct" and her government had formally expressed its "concern" to Beijing.

Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta described the tweet as "disinformation" and said "anything that inflames sentiment between countries is not acceptable." Opposition National Party leader Judith Collins told *Newshub* the tweet was "false" and "abhorrent."

These statements are breathtakingly dishonest and hypocritical. Ardern and Mahuta have not condemned Australia's war crimes because they support the war. In 2001, New Zealand's Labour Party-led coalition government, which included the pseudo-left Alliance Party, sent special forces to join the invasion of Afghanistan. Successive NZ governments redeployed troops to both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Mahuta's statement exposes the utter fraud of her claim to TVNZ on November 29 that "as a Maori and as a woman" she understood "the impact of colonisation... on indigenous people" and would stand up for "human rights." Mahuta has been glorified in the media on the basis of her ethnicity and gender, just as Ardern has been hailed for leading a "kind" government, while in fact strengthening the alliance with the US and attacking workers' living standards at home.

On December 1, a spokesperson for China's foreign ministry, Hua Chunying, said she was "very surprised" that New Zealand was defending Australia and asked: "Can it be that New Zealand agrees with or even supports Australia's deeds?"

When reporters asked why Ardern had not spoken against the killing of Afghan civilians, she replied: "our international framework is geared up for each nation to take responsibility where that's occurred. New Zealand's had to do that in the past."

In fact, the Labour government and the previous

National Party government have covered up crimes by New Zealand special forces (NZSAS) in Afghanistan. The NZSAS, like their Australian counterparts, are highly trained killers whose job was to spread terror in the population to suppress resistance to the US-led occupation. This year an official inquiry into a NZSAS raid on an Afghan village in 2010, in which civilians were killed, found that the killings were “legal.”

This was just one of many crimes for which no one has been held accountable, including evidence that unexploded bombs used by New Zealand killed and wounded 17 Afghans, including children.

Any criminal investigations prompted by the Brereton report will produce a similar whitewash. The Australian inquiry was modelled on British military-run inquiries into war crimes, which did not result in prosecutions.

The confected outrage over Zhao’s tweet has reinvigorated a long-running anti-China campaign by dominant sections of the political establishment, aimed at integrating New Zealand into US war plans.

Labour Party MP Louisa Wall and National MP Simon O’Connor have joined the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC), which characterised Chinese criticism of Australian war crimes as “abusive bullying behaviour.” IPAC, which includes politicians from the US, Britain, Germany and Japan, among others, also backs Australia in its intensifying trade dispute with China.

Wall told *Stuff*: “We’re standing up for our Australian mates who... are being bullied by a global superpower.” O’Connor denounced what he alleged was Chinese “interference” in New Zealand politics.

This echoed claims by academic Anne-Marie Brady, whose anti-Chinese “research” is sponsored by the NATO military alliance and has been praised by former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. In 2017 Brady claimed, without any evidence, that National Party MP Jian Yang and Labour MP Raymond Huo were agents of the Chinese Communist Party. She advocated a full-blown McCarthyite campaign, including state surveillance of Chinese language media, student groups, academics and others within New Zealand.

Speaking with Radio NZ (RNZ) on December 1, Brady said Zhao Lijian’s tweet was part of a “propaganda war against Australia,” a claim she repeated in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. One appalled listener wrote to RNZ: “Wow! Aussie SAS do war crimes and you’re talking about a tweet. Awesome deflection.”

Media company *Stuff* echoed Brady, calling Zhao’s tweet “a squalid piece of Chinese propaganda.” The

editorial hypocritically denounced Beijing’s human rights abuses, while declaring that the systemic murder of Afghan civilians must not detract from the “professionalism, decency and heroism” of the imperialist forces.

The “liberal” *Daily Blog*, supported by Unite and other trade unions, is among the most vocal participants in the anti-China campaign. In a hysterical post headlined “China ratcheting up tension with Australia,” editor Martyn Bradbury warned that Beijing could “strangle” NZ’s exports, shoot down satellites launched from New Zealand, and even call “mass demonstrations” by Chinese people living in NZ.

In another article Bradbury said Zhao’s tweet was an example of “wolf warrior diplomacy” intended to “push Australia around and force them to acquiesce to Chinese dominance.” He called for New Zealand to reduce its economic links with China, its major trading partner.

The attempt to paint China as seeking to “dominate” Australia and NZ turns reality on its head. The US ruling class has responded to the historic crisis of capitalism, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, by ratcheting up trade war measures and military threats against China, which Washington views as its major global rival. Australia and New Zealand, imperialist countries closely allied to the US, have applauded the enlarged US military presence in the Asia-Pacific region, which is explicitly aimed at pushing back against China.

Wellington and Canberra are defending and covering up past war crimes while pouring billions of dollars into their armed forces in preparation to join new and even more devastating imperialist wars. The enraged reaction to Zhao’s tweet is a clear indication that opposition to war, which will inevitably erupt among workers and youth, will be demonised as foreign or Chinese-inspired propaganda.



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