

New Zealand, Japan prime ministers sign security pact

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New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern used what was publicly-billed as a “trade mission” to Singapore and Tokyo last month to sign a significant new security pact with Japan’s Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. Ardern was on her first overseas trip in over two years due to the COVID pandemic.

The NZ-Japan agreement, announced on April 21 after months of preparation, signifies a further strengthening of strategic alliances and partnerships, centred on the US, to confront China and prepare for major conflict. Tokyo and Wellington are both looking to extend their reach further into the Pacific.

The pact enables the two countries to negotiate a legal framework for an intelligence-sharing arrangement to “enable more seamless sharing” of classified material. Ardern confirmed the arrangement could see information classified as “top secret” being exchanged.

Ardern and Kishida committed to holding regular dialogues between leaders, foreign ministers and defence ministers, “with a view to promoting closer bilateral ties and deepening our coordination on regional and global challenges.” This will include working closely together on “cyber security” and matters of economic security.

A joint statement promised stepped-up military co-operation between Japan’s so-called Self-Defense Forces (SDF) and the NZ Defence Force. It noted the “close partnership” achieved during recent deployments of NZ Air Force aircraft to Japan and foreshadowed further Japan-New Zealand bilateral military exercises.

The preparations for intelligence sharing are particularly significant. While NZ has a relatively small military, it is a partner in the top-level “Five Eyes” intelligence network with the US, Britain, Canada and Australia. New Zealand’s Waihopai spy base, partly

funded by the US, intercepts electronic communications on a vast scale throughout the Asia Pacific, including in China.

The agreement will strengthen Tokyo’s case to eventually join the Five Eyes partnership. Japan has previously negotiated intelligence-sharing agreements with the US, Britain and Australia, and the pact with New Zealand will give it access to more sensitive Five Eyes material.

In 2020, then Japanese Defence Minister Taro Kono proposed Japanese membership in a revamped “Six Eyes”. Last year, Shingo Yamagami, Japan’s ambassador to Australia, said that he “would like to see this idea become reality in the near future”. A major overhaul of Japan’s intelligence apparatus, including the passage of a state secrets law in 2013 against broad public opposition, was in part to further this ambition.

The central thrust of the new agreement was against China and also Russia. The joint statement tied the pact to declarations about “protecting peace and security in the Indo-Pacific”. Kishida declared in his opening remarks: “Russia’s aggression against Ukraine has shaken the very foundation of the international order, and I want to work closely with New Zealand to take resolute responses.”

Like New Zealand, Japan has backed the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. In early March, Kishida, from the right-wing Liberal Democratic Party, formally announced a series of “powerful sanctions” on Moscow following an online meeting with US President Joe Biden and allied leaders.

The sanctions are part of Tokyo’s alignment with Washington’s war drive against Russia and China. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg announced in March that the alliance had agreed to “step up cooperation with our partners in the Asia-Pacific.”

NATO will provide Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea with “practical and political cooperation” in cyber surveillance, new technology, and “countering disinformation.”

Ardern emphasised that Japan and New Zealand were aligned on the major issues amid a “volatile strategic environment”. The two would commit to “an Indo-Pacific region that is open, inclusive, stable, prosperous, and underpinned by a rules-based order free from coercion,” she declared. Ardern said any threat to another nation's sovereignty would not be tolerated and there will be “a swift response should that occur in any other region or country.”

The references to the “rules-based order” and “security of the Indo-Pacific” reprise Washington’s self-serving assertions that the “rules” US imperialism imposed after World War II give it the unfettered right to enforce its global hegemony. What is being prepared is an aggressive US-led war against China, into which every country in the Asia-Pacific region is being drawn.

Ardern’s expressions of concern about threats to national sovereignty—a thinly veiled swipe at China over Taiwan—are utterly hypocritical. New Zealand’s agreement with Japan was announced just two days after the Solomon Islands signed a security agreement with China. The US, Australia and New Zealand immediately lashed out, claiming, despite denials from Honiara, that it would allow Beijing to establish a Chinese military base in the South Pacific.

A US delegation led by Kurt Campbell, the White House Indo-Pacific coordinator, visited Honiara to lay down the law to Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare. When Sogavare refused to back down, the White House declared that if Chinese established a de-facto military presence in the Solomons the US would “respond accordingly”—a thinly-veiled threat of a US military intervention or regime-change operation.

Ardern, of course, made not the slightest protest against the US threat to the national sovereignty of the Solomons. Japan sent its own top official to intervene. Parliamentary Vice Foreign Minister Kentaro Uesugi directly conveyed Japan’s “apprehension” over China’s “military activities” in the South Pacific, according to the *Japan Times*.

The anti-China thrust of the NZ-Japan pact was highlighted by the joint statement, which reeled off

“serious concerns” about China’s purported “human rights” violations in Xinjiang and Hong Kong, and “strong opposition to any unilateral actions” by China “to alter the status quo in the South China Sea.

In reality, it is the US that has deliberately raised tension with China throughout the region, including its naval provocations in the South China Sea and the narrow Taiwan Strait between Taiwan and the Chinese mainland. The US has repeatedly used the banner of “human rights” to justify the raining of death and destruction on the targeted country, while ignoring the human rights abuses of its strategic allies and partners.

By sticking to Washington’s anti-China propaganda script, the New Zealand and Japanese prime ministers demonstrate that their governments are fully on board the reckless drive by US imperialism to reassert its hegemony in Europe and Asia against China and Russia.



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