

# New Zealand signs defence pacts with Japan, Fiji

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Amid a flurry of diplomatic activity last week, New Zealand's Labour-led government escalated its involvement in the US-led confrontation and preparations for war against China.

On the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue, held in Singapore from June 10-12, NZ Defence Minister Andrew Little signed a Statement of Intent for greater military cooperation with Japan. The deal follows last year's signing of a bilateral intelligence sharing agreement, aimed at strengthening Japan's case to ultimately join the "Five Eyes" intelligence sharing network involving the United States, New Zealand, Australia, the UK and Canada.

Tokyo and Wellington, which have both backed the US-NATO proxy war against Russia, are seeking to extend their reach further into the Pacific. The agreement is part of the plethora of alliances being built up around the western Pacific to confront China and prepare for war. It will see deeper integration of the New Zealand Defence Forces (NZDF) into the regional "security" schemes being driven by the United States and its ally, Australia.

Little said the statement was the culmination of more than two years of discussions, "including consultation with Pacific partners to ensure alignment with Pacific priorities." It would seek to "strengthen collaboration with Pacific partners and regional institutions on ... maritime security, humanitarian and disaster relief, and climate change," he said.

There has already been military cooperation between Japan's so-called Self-Defense Forces and the NZDF, including deployments of NZ Air Force aircraft to Japan. Notwithstanding its purported focus on "humanitarian" efforts, the new pact opens the door to more direct collaboration. The statement highlighted the response of both countries to the 2022 volcanic

eruption in Tonga. Such emergencies, involving military equipment and personnel, are used as full-scale "defence" exercises.

The US is strengthening its military ties with Japan as it prepares for conflict with China and is encouraging Tokyo to forge closer relations with other American allies and strategic partners in the region. Japan is part of the quasi-military pact known as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue along with the US, India and Australia. US military bases in Japan would play a critical role in any war with China.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin travelled to Tokyo on his way to the Shangri-La event and stated the two countries' militaries "are operating and training together like never before."

Japan plans to double military spending over the next five years as it develops long-range missiles capable of striking targets abroad and ramps up its own war planning against China. A stronger trilateral relationship between the US, Japan, and South Korea is regarded by Washington as a vital aspect of its ballistic missile system in the region.

In concert with the US, Japan is seeking to advance their own interests across the region. In March, Japan's Foreign Minister Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi became the first to visit the Solomon Islands, which has been at the centre of strategic tensions since signing a defence pact with Beijing last year. Hayashi and his Solomons counterpart Jeremiah Manele agreed on strengthening cooperation towards a "free and open Indo-Pacific"—the mantra employed by the US and its allies to assert their domination of the region.

In April, Japan's "Maritime Self-Defence Force" began its largest tour yet of the Indo-Pacific, including a port call in Kiribati which had switched its diplomatic allegiance from Taiwan to Beijing in 2019. The naval

deployment is scheduled to run for 151 days through to September, involving 1,190 personnel aboard three surface vessels and a submarine.

Little's signing of the Japan agreement makes it clear that New Zealand is fully on board with the reckless drive by US imperialism to reassert its global hegemony against Russia and China. It takes place amid ongoing efforts at Washington's behest to strong-arm Pacific governments to put aside their reservations and align with the US war drive. Australia is currently pushing proposed security pacts with both Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu that have stalled over concerns by both Pacific countries about the impact on their sovereignty.

Last week, Fiji's Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka made his first visit to Wellington since assuming office in January. He held meetings with senior New Zealand government officials, including the prime minister and opposition leader, and announced a new defence agreement between the two countries.

Little has been dispatched to Suva this week to sign a Status of Forces Agreement providing the "legal framework" for New Zealand and Fijian military forces "to effectively cooperate within each other's territories." Little said: "Our militaries already cooperate across many areas and I look forward to further strengthening this enduring relationship with the Republic of Fiji as one of our key Pacific partners."

Rabuka is "readjusting" relations away from China, recently threatening to cancel a 2011 police training and exchange agreement with Beijing. At his Wellington press conference he said, referring to China: "If our systems and our values differ, what cooperation can we get from them?" Fiji is expected to shortly have a fully-fledged diplomatic mission operating in Washington with an ambassador now appointed.

Sections of the New Zealand ruling elite remain nervous about jeopardising relations with China, the country's most important trading partner. To that end, Hipkins has announced he will be leading a trade delegation to China later this month.

However, last Friday New Zealand signed a joint statement with Japan and the Five Eyes partners condemning so-called "economic coercion" and "nonmarket policies" regarding trade and investment. While the declaration did not explicitly name China, Beijing got the message. On Twitter Wang Xiaolong,

China's Ambassador in Wellington, shot back; "Smearing other countries, either directly or indirectly, won't whitewash one's own dismal record on coercion."

The rapidly advancing war preparations, and their likely catastrophic consequences, are being deliberately hidden from the New Zealand population, which has long anti-war traditions, as campaigning for the country's critical election, due on October 14, unfolds.

Speaking at a NZ Institute for International Affairs (NZIIA) conference on June 8, visiting US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Daniel Kritenbrink, falsely "reassured" the audience that "we do not seek conflict with China or a new Cold War," declaring: "We are not trying to contain China."

NZ Foreign Minister Mahuta who, a façade for a so-called "indigenous" Maori foreign policy, is dishonestly masquerading as a "peacemaker." She echoed Kritenbrink's message, declaring that while the international environment "may be more complicated," it "does not represent 'a new Cold War' or require binary choices"—i.e. between Washington and Beijing.

Mahuta then emphasised that the US is fundamental "to the underpinning of the international system, and we recognise the important role of the US to uphold and promote the international rule of law." In reality, US imperialism has been engaged in one illegal neo-colonial military operation after another in the past three decades.

In other words, the "choice" has been made. While boasting its "independent" foreign policy, as a minor imperialist power in the Pacific, New Zealand has always relied on the backing of one or other major power—first Britain then the US—to support its neo-colonial operations. As in the lead-up to New Zealand's entry into World Wars I and II, the country's room to manoeuvre has all but evaporated.



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