

New Zealand establishes closer military ties with Australia against China

Tom Peters
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New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters and Defence Minister Judith Collins and their Australian counterparts Penny Wong and Richard Marles issued a joint statement on February 1 announcing their intention “to further strengthen the Australia-New Zealand alliance to address challenges in close partnership.”

The “ANZMIN” statement, which followed talks in Melbourne between the four ministers, makes clear that the Australian Labor government and New Zealand’s far-right National Party-led coalition government are proceeding in lockstep to place their countries on a war footing as part of the US-led alliance against China.

US imperialism is plunging the globe into a catastrophic war as it seeks to secure its hegemony and subjugate Russia and China by military means. Washington continues to inflame tensions with China over Taiwan and the South China Sea, having militarised the Indo-Pacific region. Meanwhile the Biden administration is ramping up the war against Russia over Ukraine, actively backing Israel’s genocide in Gaza, and threatening war against Iran.

The Australia-NZ statement refers to “the enduring nature of the ANZUS Treaty” signed in 1951, under which Australia and New Zealand, as minor imperialist powers, have served as important allies of the United States in the Pacific region.

The reference to ANZUS is unusual and significant because in 1986 the US suspended its obligations to New Zealand under the treaty, in response to New Zealand’s ban on nuclear-powered vessels entering its waters. Despite this partial rift, New Zealand’s alliance with the US was maintained behind the scenes and strengthened under successive governments, with New Zealand playing a key role in the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing network, alongside the US, Australia, Canada and the UK.

The ANZMIN document also calls for “building on our Anzac history,” a reference to the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZACs) in World War I and II. It states: “Ministers committed to increasing integration between our military forces, including through common

capability, exchanges of senior military officers and increased participation in warfighting exercises.”

Marles told the media: “We are committed to constructing two defence forces which are seamless in the way in which we operate.”

The ministers also discussed enhanced “regional cooperation and interoperability” with Pacific countries, many of which are impoverished semi-colonies of Australia and New Zealand. The statement expressed support for creating a Pacific Response Group (PRG)—a military unit that would also involve forces from France, Chile, Tonga, Papua New Guinea and Fiji.

On December 7, after the PRG was initially discussed at a meeting of regional defence ministers, Marles told reporters that the unit would be able to “immediately” deploy anywhere in the Pacific to respond to “a natural disaster or... a moment of civil unrest or insecurity.”

These discussions are aimed at countering growing Chinese influence in the Pacific. Beijing’s recent negotiations with Papua New Guinea over policing cooperation have provoked a furious response in Canberra. In 2022, a security agreement signed between China and the Solomon Islands prompted threats of an invasion by the US.

In an extended denunciation of China, the ANZMIN statement says ministers “expressed serious concern over developments in the South China Sea,” including China’s “militarisation of disputed features,” and “destabilising or coercive unilateral actions” in the East China Sea. Regarding Taiwan, Australia and New Zealand it “reaffirmed the importance of peace and stability” in resolving disputes without “the threat or use of coercion.”

All of this turns reality on its head. In fact, it is the US that has militarised the region and encircled China, boosting its military presence in the Philippines, South Korea, Japan and Australia itself. The Biden administration has supplied weapons and begun stationing troops in Taiwan, and staged repeated military exercises that are clearly aimed at provoking conflict with China.

With boundless hypocrisy, the Australian and NZ

ministers expressed “grave concerns about human rights violations in Xinjiang... the erosion of religious, cultural, educational and linguistic rights and freedoms in Tibet, and the continuing systemic erosion of Hong Kong’s autonomy, freedom, rights and democratic processes.”

This comes from two imperialist powers that have participated for more than two decades in criminal US-led wars against Iraq and Afghanistan, which killed more than a million people and left entire countries in ruins. The ruling elites in Australia and New Zealand have deployed troops to assist in training Ukrainian conscripts to fight against Russia in a war that has killed hundreds of thousands of people, and are supporting Israel’s genocidal war against Gaza.

The ANZMIN statement cynically expressed “deep concern at the scale of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and ongoing risk to all Palestinian civilians.” The ministers called on Israel to abide by the interim ruling of the International Court of Justice, which called for steps to be taken to avoid genocide. At the same time, they fraudulently state that Israel is “defending itself” and that “any sustainable ceasefire” requires Hamas to “lay down its arms.”

In other words, the genocide—in which more than 27,000 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces and more than a million are homeless and starving—cannot end without the complete victory of Israel over Hamas.

The ministers reaffirmed their support for the US- and UK-led bombing of Yemen. The country’s Houthi militias have taken action to disrupt shipping in the Red Sea that is supplying Israel. Australia and New Zealand are both contributing personnel and intelligence to the illegal war against this impoverished country, which has endured more than a decade of genocidal conflict, backed by the US.

The Australia-NZ statement praises the AUKUS military pact between Australia, the UK and US as “a positive contribution toward maintaining peace, security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.” AUKUS includes an agreement to supply Australia with nuclear-powered attack submarines and to develop hypersonic missiles, as part of the transformation of the country into a frontline base for the coming war with China.

Marles said Australian officials will soon visit New Zealand to discuss what role it can play in AUKUS’s “second pillar,” which involves the sharing of military technology. NZ Defence Minister Collins said she hoped this could happen quickly.

The Chinese embassy in New Zealand issued a scathing response to the Australia-NZ talks. It denounced AUKUS as “a stark manifestation of Cold War mentality as it seeks to establish a nuclear-related exclusive military alliance that targets third parties,” which will “undermine peace and

stability, sow division and confrontation in the region.”

The embassy sharply objected to the statements on Taiwan, Xinjiang and Hong Kong, saying that these were “China’s internal affairs which bear on China’s core interests, and brook no external interference.”

In the past, New Zealand governments have been reluctant to join Washington’s and Canberra’s belligerent denunciations of China, because of New Zealand’s economic reliance on agricultural exports to China. This has changed under conditions of constant US provocations and threats against China, and increasing discussion in strategic think tanks and governments about the inevitability of war.

The New Zealand ruling class, under both the previous Labour Party-led government and the current National Party government, is assuring Washington of its support in order to gain a seat at the table in the new redivision of Asia, the Pacific and the world.

The corporate media is playing its part in seeking to condition the public for war, with the *New Zealand Herald* declaring that the Defence Force is in a “crisis” and the SAS commando unit is “on the verge of collapse,” requiring major investment and recruitment. The government plans to increase military spending from about 1.4 to 2 percent of gross domestic product.

Workers and young people, however, are intensely hostile to war, as seen in the ongoing, weekly demonstrations by thousands of people against the Israeli-US genocide in Gaza. The moves to militarise the country, paid for by cutting funds for public services that ordinary people rely on, will provoke mass opposition.

Those joining the anti-war protests should have no illusions that the government, or the opposition Labour Party, can be pressured to change course. All the capitalist parties support New Zealand’s alliance with the US and Australia, and the country’s own imperialist activities in the Pacific. A catastrophic Third World War, which is already in its opening stages, can only be stopped through a unified movement of the working class internationally, based on a socialist program to put an end to capitalism, which is the source of war.



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