

Anti-China “hacking” furore highlights New Zealand’s growing integration into war preparations

John Braddock, Tom Peters
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New Zealand’s political establishment and media have joined the US and Britain in a campaign vilifying China over charges of espionage. The country’s main intelligence agency—the Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB)—confirmed an alleged breach immediately after the UK and US accused China of similar, but “higher level,” attacks.

Defence Minister Judith Collins stated on March 26 that the Parliamentary Service and Parliamentary Counsel Office had been targeted in a China-linked 2021 cyberattack. The Parliamentary Service provides administrative and support services to parliament and MPs, while the Parliamentary Counsel Office is responsible for drafting and publishing legislation. Collins said it was the first cyber-attack on New Zealand’s “democratic institutions” she was aware of.

According to GCSB director Andrew Clark, in August 2021 the agency became aware of “malicious activity” that compromised the parliamentary offices. He claimed that an investigation linked the hack to China’s ministry of state security and an affiliated group known as APT40, and because the breach was “detected quickly,” no sensitive data was taken.

A Chinese embassy spokesperson rejected the accusations as “groundless and irresponsible” and lodged diplomatic protests expressing “strong dissatisfaction and resolute opposition.” The statement came shortly after New Zealand’s Foreign Minister Winston Peters had cautioned China against “further interference.”

The sudden bringing forward of an alleged breach dating back to 2021 is clearly part of a co-ordinated operation with New Zealand’s allies in the Five Eyes spy network, which is led by the US and also includes Australia and Canada. Over the past week, US and British officials have filed charges, imposed sanctions, and accused Beijing over an alleged cyber-espionage campaign claimed to hit “millions” of people, including lawmakers, academics, journalists and others.

As the WWSW noted, the lurid accusations, accompanied by a hysterical media barrage, are part of the US-led efforts to directly confront China and prepare for war, in order to establish unchallenged US global hegemony. The campaign

signals an accelerated reversal of a previous thawing in relations between the UK and Beijing, with demands that China be officially declared a “threat” to national interests.

Nervous about endangering New Zealand’s economic reliance on China, its largest trading partner accounting for nearly 30 percent of exports, the far-right National Party-led government stopped short of imposing sanctions. Peters declared that the public naming of China, “a rare step in itself, is an appropriate response.” The issue was reportedly not raised with China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi during his visit to Wellington last month.

The accusation, however, is part of stepped up efforts to integrate New Zealand into imperialist war plans. It comes after growing indications from Wellington that it intends to join the AUKUS (Australia-UK-US) military pact, which is aimed at supplying Australia with nuclear-powered submarines and other weapons, and increasing the sharing of military technology between the allied imperialist powers.

New Zealand’s intelligence agencies are playing a key role in stoking animosity towards China. At the same time as the “hacking” allegations were made, New Zealand’s internal spy agency, the Special Intelligence Service (NZSIS), told a parliamentary hearing that seven New Zealanders had been involved in providing military aviation training for the Chinese army.

NZSIS director general Andrew Hampton declared: “Such activity clearly poses a major national security risk and it is not in New Zealand’s interest to have former military personnel training in other military who does not share the same values as our own.”

Such statements are utterly hypocritical. New Zealand is a minor imperialist power, and the “values” of its ruling class are expressed in its close alignment with the US. Successive Labour and National-led governments have joined the criminal wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The last Labour government sent troops to Britain to train Ukrainian forces to fight against Russia, and both major parties support the US-backed Israeli genocide underway in Gaza.

As a member of the Five Eyes, the GCSB carries out mass

surveillance in every part of the globe, including against China, and to assist US military operations.

On March 21, New Zealand's Inspector General of Intelligence and Security (IGIS) Brendan Horsley revealed in a report that an unnamed "foreign agency" had run a secret spy operation out of the GCSB from 2012–2020 without the relevant government ministers knowing. Former Labour Party Prime Minister Helen Clark, in charge of the agency from 2003–2008, identified the US as the most likely foreign power involved.

The signals system "had the potential to be used, in conjunction with other –intelligence sources, to support military action against targets," Horsley admitted. He said some GCSB staff had raised "legal and moral issues" over its use.

The report said the decision to host the foreign system was "improper" and that the GCSB "could not be sure the tasking of the capability was always in accordance with... New Zealand law."

No one will be held accountable, however, for the close, day-to-day collaboration between the spy agency and US war machine, of which the system alluded to by Horsley is just one component.

Investigative journalist Nicky Hager told *Newsroom* on March 28 the spy equipment appeared to be a top-secret US surveillance system installed at the Waihopai satellite spy base and another GCSB facility. From the few details in Horsley's report, Hager identified it as a likely US National Security Agency (NSA) system codenamed "APPARITION."

A NSA internal report, written after the launch of APPARITION in 2008, said that it "builds on... a tool that enabled a significant number of capture-kill operations against terrorists." Capture-kill operations involve lethal attacks on targeted people using drones, bombs and special forces raids.

The 2008 report said the APPARITION system at Misawa, a major NSA base in northern Japan, was "currently targeting VSAT (very small satellite) terminals believed to be servicing Internet cafés used by high-value counterterrorism (CT) targets in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Indonesia, as well as non-CT targets in China."

Hager noted that human rights organisations have documented numerous civilian deaths during US capture-kill operations, many of them "algorithmically targeted" by systems like APPARITION.

New Zealand also carries out its own spying activities in line with its imperialist interests in the Asia-Pacific region. Documents released in 2015 by whistleblower Edward Snowden revealed that the GCSB spied intensively on nearly two dozen countries. It included all communications in Tonga, Samoa, Vanuatu, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Nauru, the Solomon Islands and Fiji, the French colonies New Caledonia and French Polynesia, and New Zealand's colonies Niue and the Cook Islands. Information from these mass surveillance activities is

shared with other Five Eyes partners.

People in New Zealand are also targeted by the spy agencies, which are particularly concerned about the nationwide protests against Israel's genocidal war against Gaza.

In an ominous statement to parliament the NZSIS's Hampton said the war had led to "heightened emotions domestically." "With increased protest, with increased coming together of different groups with opposed views, there may be spontaneous violence," although it would not rise to the level of terrorism," he added.

The NZSIS, according to another recent report by Horsley, increasingly obtains "class" warrants—as opposed to individual warrants—that enable it to spy on a whole class of people who meet broad criteria. The agency can put people "under maximum surveillance without anyone outside the NZSIS having seen the case for it." Horsley downplayed the issue, saying that the NZSIS was "reasonably cautious" with its warrants and he merely had criticisms about the process.

Horsley's reports, in which most of the details are classified, are basically a public relations exercise, intended to give the appearance of transparency and accountability where there is in fact neither. Far from being an independent watch-dog, as he is depicted in the media, he plays an integral role in the state apparatus.

The campaign by the GCSB and NZSIS to whip up anti-China hysteria, while escalating their own involvement in imperialist wars and mass surveillance, is part of moves to place New Zealand on a war footing. This is being done behind the backs of the population, which did not vote for this militarist and anti-democratic agenda.

These developments underscore the urgent need for the international anti-war movement to adopt a socialist perspective, mobilising the working class to put an end to capitalism, which is the source of war.



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