

New Zealand and Australia to build integrated military force against China

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On December 6, the Australian Labor government's Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Defence Minister Richard Marles visited New Zealand for talks with their counterparts in the National Party-led government, Winston Peters and Judith Collins.

The four ministers signed a Joint Statement on Closer Defence Relations, which committed to greater "coordination, alignment, and interoperability between our defence forces." The statement envisions "an increasingly integrated 'Anzac' force" that will combine the two countries' militaries in the event of a war—like the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (Anzac) that fought as allies of British imperialism in World War I.

Today, the imperialist powers led by the US are waging multiple bloody wars that are rapidly developing into a catastrophic Third World War. These include the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza, the wars against Lebanon and Syria, threats and provocations against Iran, and the devastating US-NATO proxy war against Russia over Ukraine. There are far-advanced preparations for war against China, which Washington views as the main obstacle to its global domination.

The governments in Australia and New Zealand support all these criminal wars as minor imperialist powers allied to the US. Canberra and Wellington are now positioning themselves to work closely with the incoming administration led by the fascist Donald Trump, which will sharply escalate the economic warfare against China and accelerate the march to all-out war.

The Closer Defence Relations statement reaffirms Australia and NZ's "commitment to one another under the 1951 ANZUS Treaty; should either nation find itself under attack within the Pacific region, we will act to meet the common danger."

New Zealand was suspended from the ANZUS (Australia-New Zealand-US) treaty after legislation in 1987 banned nuclear-armed and nuclear-powered ships from entering its waters. In the past year, however, the government has repeatedly stated that it remains committed to ANZUS, meaning that New Zealand would automatically be involved in a US-Australia war against China.

There is no popular mandate for joining the alliance. The National Party and its coalition partners—the far-right ACT and New Zealand First—did not campaign for the revival of ANZUS in the 2023 election, in which foreign policy was barely discussed.

A second joint statement from the New Zealand and Australian ministerial meeting (ANZMIN) focused on denouncing China. It expressed "concern" at China's "recent testing of an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile terminating within the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone, conducted without adequate advanced notice to all countries affected in line with best practice."

The statement also refers to "instances of unsafe and unprofessional behaviour by China's military, coast guard vessels and maritime militia, including towards the Philippines" in the South China Sea. The ministers "also expressed serious concerns about the situation in the East China Sea" and the Taiwan Strait and called on "all states to adhere to international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea."

Such statements turn reality on its head. It is the US and its allies that have turned the region into a powder keg, with their military build-up and relentless provocations aimed against China. In September, New Zealand, Australia and, for the first time, Japan sailed navy vessels through the Taiwan Strait in Chinese territorial waters. In the Philippines, the US has deployed missiles that are capable of striking the

Chinese coast and Beijing.

The ANZMIN meeting endorsed the AUKUS (Australia-UK-US) military pact, which aims to supply Australia with nuclear-powered attack submarines, as well as missiles, and to increase the sharing of military technology and resources. The agreement is a part of the efforts to turn Australia into a front-line base of operations for war with China.

New Zealand is in discussions about joining AUKUS, which China has warned could endanger relations between the two countries. New Zealand's economy depends heavily on trade with China.

Perhaps the most hypocritical part of the ANZMIN statement was the ministers' expression of "grave concerns about human rights violations in Xinjiang," as well as Tibet and Hong Kong.

The same statement legitimises Israel's genocide in Gaza, saying that Australia and New Zealand "respected Israel's right to defend itself," while calling on the Israeli regime—led by the wanted war criminal and fascist Netanyahu—to abide by international law and protect civilians. Hundreds of thousands of people have been slaughtered and millions are starving in Gaza, where the vast majority of residential buildings, hospitals and other infrastructure has been destroyed.

For decades, Australia and New Zealand have joined illegal wars led by the US, including the brutal imperialist occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, in which Australian and NZ troops committed multiple war crimes.

At a press conference in New Zealand, Australia's Penny Wong declared that "we are in a permanent state of contest in our region, that is the reality." The two countries had to work together "to be participants in the reshaping of our region in pursuit of the same objectives, which are peace, security and prosperity."

The two powers exercise neo-colonial domination over their Pacific Island neighbours, including Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Samoa, Tonga and Fiji.

The ANZMIN statement hailed the Pacific Response Group, which brings together the militaries of several countries, under Australian and NZ leadership, enabling them to deploy rapidly anywhere in the Pacific to suppress social unrest or carry out regime-change operations. The statement also noted the importance of the Pacific Policing Initiative, which will embed

Australian and NZ police to provide training and leadership across the Pacific.

Millions of workers and young people in Australia and NZ are profoundly hostile to the Gaza genocide and the war preparations against China. In Australia, a recent poll found 57 percent of participants opposed supporting a US war against China.

The IPSOS New Zealand Issues Monitor, published in October, which asked around 1,000 people to identify "the three most important issues facing the country," found that only 1 percent considered "defence/foreign affairs" a major issue. The top issues were the cost of living, healthcare and the economy—reflecting concern and anger over rising social inequality and the destruction of public health services.

This is a matter of increasing concern for the ruling elite. Currently New Zealand spends about 1 percent of its gross domestic product on the military, but both the National government and the opposition Labour Party support a major increase, in line with Washington's demands. This will be paid for with even more brutal attacks on public services and workers' living standards.

What is required to stop the mad descent into world war are not pacifist appeals to governments—which have ignored the protests against the Gaza genocide—but the building of a unified international movement of the working class based on socialism to put an end to the capitalist system, which is responsible for militarism, war and inequality.



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