

New Zealand Defence Force aims to double recruitment

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New Zealand's military head, Air Marshal Tony Davies, told a parliamentary committee on December 2 that the NZ Defence Force (NZDF) was “dusting off the history books” and looking at “what New Zealand had to do to survive and grow its military back in 1938.” The NZDF must make “drastic changes,” Davies declared, to raise recruitment numbers “significantly higher, just as our forebears did around each world war or each major conflict.”

Davies' referencing of two world wars is a stark warning of the rapidly advancing political and military crisis. NZ's ruling elite is complicit in US-led imperialist wars around the globe—from supporting the Gaza genocide and the NATO war against Russia over Ukraine to warmongering against China. These are fronts in a developing third world war, which threatens a catastrophe far greater than the wars of the last century.

In May, US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth declared that China posed an “imminent” threat and demanded that US allies in Asia prepare for war over Taiwan by 2027.

New Zealand, a minor imperialist power allied to the US, is in the process of doubling military spending from 1 to 2 percent of GDP. Invoking the Australia and NZ Army Corps (Anzac) alliance of World War I, Prime Minister Christopher Luxon stated earlier this year: “We want to be a force multiplier, we want to be one essential Anzac force operating within our region.”

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Winston Peters recently announced another \$NZ15 million to supply Ukraine with weapons and equipment. This brings NZ's total support for the war against Russia, including during the previous Labour-Greens government, to over \$NZ168 million.

Underscoring the urgency with which the NZDF is

mobilising, on December 5 Chief of Army Rose King launched a new Motorised Infantry Battle Group, declaring that “in today's uncertain strategic environment we need to be ready to fight tonight.” The unit, she promised, would provide “a more agile, adaptable and lethal combat force.”

Davies told MPs that the military preparations require the “assistance of New Zealand society and government like we've never had before.” The NZDF is immediately aiming to double its recruiting capacity to 1,500 a year. Last year the forces recruited 700 personnel, falling short of a target of 800. “We need to be able to raise that two-fold, five-fold, 10-fold in a very short space of time,” he declared.

Such a rapid and sharp increase will only be possible with conscription, as happened in World Wars I and II, in which tens of thousands of young New Zealanders were sent to fight and die in the service of imperialism. Sections of the media are already agitating for the introduction of compulsory military training.

Davies said the NZDF was addressing “hollowness and gaps” left by mass departures in the first years of the COVID pandemic and that attrition had now stabilised. The more “volatile” international environment was helping keep people in the military because it gave them a “sense of purpose,” he claimed. A more likely explanation is that rising unemployment—now 15.2 percent for under-25-year-olds—is pressuring young people to join or remain in the military.

Secretary of Defence Brook Barrington told MPs the range of new technology and its speed of development posed “pressures” that would force Defence to change its appetite for “risk.” It might buy an off-the-shelf drone for \$5,000 and find it was not fit for the military, “but it was worth spending the \$5,000 upfront” to find

out, he said.

Barrington highlighted the scale and urgency of having to virtually replace the entire ageing naval fleet by 2035, as well as transform how the navy operated.

He described the space arena as the “number one priority” in the burgeoning defence industry. New Zealand is involved in three international space programs: a satellite monitoring system and two multinational space forums or alliances, one called Operation Olympic Defender, all led by the US.

Barrington noted that “in some parts of the New Zealand public [the militarisation of space is] a matter of concern.” However, “the stable door was open” and the horses were already “bolting.”

NZ had joined the space groups “to try and work with others and not just Five Eyes but France, Germany, Norway, to reinforce good behaviour in space and to call out bad behaviour.” This is a particularly specious claim: international “good behaviour” is defined by the US and its imperialist allies. The Five Eyes is a top-level, US-led intelligence sharing network including NZ, UK, Australia and Canada.

A new Defence Industry Strategy, launched in October by Defence and Space Minister Judith Collins, puts the development of space related technology “front and centre” at the same time that US space weapons are in record demand. The strategy emphasises strengthening local companies to take advantage of growing export potential, including the production of drones and other hardware.

The NZDF has already begun playing a regular part in “kill chain” multinational exercises, joining with allied command-and-control centres across a mega-network of sensors, which is among the US Pentagon’s top priorities. The US-NZ company Rocket Lab, with a capacity to launch satellites from NZ soil, has recently expanded its ability to supply space-based missile warning systems.

Opposition Labour and Green Party MPs at the parliamentary committee hearing endorsed the vast military build-up. The Greens’ Teanau Tuiono said “I hear what you’re saying around being combat ready,” merely adding that “other roles” such as humanitarian aid and disaster relief should not be “overshadowed.” Davies retorted that all those functions are subordinate to “our core combat role.”

Labour’s Peeni Henare, a former defence minister,

fulsomely praised the “exciting” development of 62 Squadron, the NZDF’s new dedicated space unit, while seeking assurances that “taxpayers are getting bang for buck” and can be guaranteed it’s “a great investment for our protection and our security interests.” His question allowed Davies to expand on the squadron’s role deterring “irresponsible behaviour” by other unnamed nations in space.

Among those endorsing the new developments is the Labour/Greens aligned *Daily Blog*. Editor Martyn Bradbury posted on December 4: “War is coming... We must use our UN voice for independence and the rule of law while leaning into our space advantages, 5 Eyes and start a drone industry.” Bradbury is a nationalist, a supporter of the war against Russia and a fanatical anti-China warmonger, who also backs demands for compulsory military service.

The expanding drive to war abroad means war against the working class at home. The \$12 billion allocated over four years for the military will only be found at the expense of the social programs and living standards of workers, who have already undertaken significant strikes against the government attacks on wages and conditions.

There is mass public opposition to war, as seen in ongoing protests against the genocide in Gaza. In every country, the movement against war must be expanded and linked with the fight against austerity, in opposition to all capitalist parties including Labour and the Greens. The working class must be mobilised to put an end to the capitalist system that produces war, and replace it with socialism.



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