

New Zealand, Japan strengthen military links

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New Zealand's Defence Minister Judith Collins signed two new defence and security pacts with Japan during a visit to Tokyo on December 19. Collins signed the agreements, which upgrade the countries' bilateral and multilateral military activities, with Japan's Foreign Affairs Minister Tshimitsu Motegi.

Collins' Japan visit capped a year in which the far-right National Party-led government further integrated New Zealand, a minor imperialist power, with the expanding US-led alliance for war in the Pacific. In August she welcomed US FBI director Kash Patel to open the agency's new office in Wellington, which he made clear is part of US war preparations against China.

During a trip to Washington in October Collins, who is also responsible for NZ's Security Intelligence Service agencies, visited CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. She met CIA head John Ratcliffe and other officials, posting photos on social media with her counterpart, President Trump's (now) Secretary of War Pete Hegseth.

Signing the military logistics deal with Japan, the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), Collins declared: "Our forces already work well together, and this agreement will create the conditions for even more seamless cooperation." Collins told the *Japan Times* that the countries' bilateral defence ties "continue to go from strength to strength."

The ACSA establishes how logistical support will be managed when the NZ Defence Force (NZDF) and the Self-Defence Forces of Japan operate together. This could include refueling at sea using the supply ship HMNZS Aotearoa, or provision of food or medical supplies during joint activities. "New Zealand is stepping up on the world stage, and this agreement will ultimately strengthen our interoperability and ability to work closely with our partners," Collins declared.

The second document, the Information Security

Agreement (ISA), provides the legal framework and procedures for handling classified information and to facilitate sharing a wider range of information securely. Collins said the ISA will enable "greater shared understanding of emerging security risks and threats." As the strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific grows "increasingly challenging," she said, Japan and New Zealand must coordinate more closely "in areas of mutual security interest."

The agreements are aimed squarely at North Korea and above all China. The *Japan Times* observed they are key to expanding the "scope and scale" of joint military activities and to "boost joint training exercises and enhance interoperability." Collins pointed to the growth of joint engagements such as naval patrols in the East and South China seas, often with the navies of "like-minded countries" including the Philippines, Australia and the United States.

New Zealand is the 10th country Japan has reached such a pact with after the signing of a similar one in The Hague on December 18 to promote "closer cooperation" with the Armed Forces of the Netherlands, again covering the reciprocal provision of supplies and services.

Japan's military alignments accompany its remilitarization and involvement in US-led war preparations against China. The Japanese government aims to double military spending by 2027. This includes acquiring offensive weaponry capable of reaching China, in a clear breach of the "Pacifist Clause" of Japan's post-World War II Constitution. Tokyo claims it has the right to engage in so-called "collective self-defence," preparing to join wars alongside allies.

The agreements upgrade a deal signed by NZ Prime Minister Christopher Luxon in Tokyo in June 2024. Luxon and then Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida signed an intelligence-sharing pact and agreed

to increase joint military “activities and exercises, including in the area of maritime security.” Luxon announced the deployment of HMNZS Aotearoa as part of the encirclement of North Korea and significantly boosted NZ’s contribution to the Korean Demilitarised Zone from 12 soldiers to 53.

New Zealand was soon involved in escalating provocations against Beijing. In September 2024 the HMNZS Aotearoa joined the Japanese destroyer JS Sazanami and Australia’s HMAS Sydney in a sail-though in the sensitive Taiwan Strait. The vessels were taking part in naval exercises in the South China Sea, which has been transformed by the US and its allies into another dangerous flashpoint for conflict with China.

In October this year, a NZ Air Force Poseidon aircraft took part for the first time in Japan’s Maritime Self-Defense Force-led Annual Exercise. In November, following another transit of the Taiwan Strait, the HMNZS Aotearoa carried out “surveillance and deterrence” activities in international waters of the East China and Yellow Seas, monitoring UN sanctions on North Korea. According to the NZDF, the Aotearoa was “shadowed” by seven Chinese warships, with Beijing clearly regarding the NZ exercise as a provocation.

Collins declared that transits of the Taiwan Strait were carried out “in accordance with international law and best practice. By doing this, we are demonstrating our commitment to the international rules-based system in our near region—the Indo-Pacific.” In fact the area is not in NZ’s “near region,” but some 9,000 kilometres away, on China’s doorstep. The so-called “rules-based system” invoked by Collins is the set of post-World War II “rules” established by Washington to ensure its global hegemony.

The Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) regularly conducts deployments across a vast area of the Indo-Pacific. In August, two JMSDF vessels, the destroyers JS Ise and JS Suzunami arrived in Wellington for a three-day diplomatic visit, the first time any Japanese naval vessel had visited New Zealand’s capital in nearly 90 years.

The developments accompany a major expansion of NZ’s military presence in South East Asia. In April Collins visited the Philippines to sign a Status of Visiting Forces Agreement strengthening military

cooperation. Washington and its allies, including Japan and Australia, are preparing the Philippines to serve as a staging ground for conflict over Taiwan.

The NZDF recently participated in the massive Australian-led Talisman Sabre exercise, training with the US, Australia, Japan and others to increase preparedness to operate together. A NZDF contingent also joined Bersama Shield, an annual exercise in the Malaysian Peninsula involving militaries from the UK, Australia, Malaysia and Singapore.

In May, Hegseth declared that China posed an “imminent” threat and demanded that US allies in Asia prepare for war over Taiwan by 2027. New Zealand’s defence budget will increase to \$NZ12 billion (\$US6.92 billion) over four years, including \$NZ9 billion of new spending, to reach 2 percent of GDP by 2032–2033.

Chris Penk, minister for Veterans Affairs, told the Bradbury Group podcast on December 16 that he was “proud” to be part of a government that is “preparing for World War III that may or may not come.”

The show’s “liberal” host Martyn Bradbury openly supports the militarist spend-up, as does the main opposition Labour Party and the union bureaucracy. It can only be carried through with deepening attacks on public services and living standards of the working class.

Defence chiefs also told a parliamentary committee last month that virtually the entire ageing naval fleet must be replaced by 2035 and called for a huge increase in recruitment into the armed forces. After Australia’s Labor government selected Japan’s advanced Mogami-class frigate for its navy upgrade, Wellington has expressed interest in the warship, which would provide full “interoperability” with both navies.

Japan and New Zealand are meanwhile also both seeking entry into “Pillar Two” of the AUKUS pact involving the US, Britain and Australia, which would give them access to its enhanced military technical capabilities program.



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