

# New Zealand Greens candidate fought in SAS during Afghanistan war

Tom Peters  
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The *New Zealand Herald* reported on August 15 that Josh Jacobsen, the Green Party's candidate for the North Shore electorate in Auckland, spent years in the military and fought in Afghanistan as a lance corporal in the New Zealand Special Air Service (NZSAS).

The NZSAS, the military's special forces unit, consists of highly trained killers. It took part in the criminal US imperialist invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and carried out numerous secret missions during the two-decade-long war that devastated the country. The unit was highly valued by Washington and received a citation from President George W. Bush in 2004.

It is estimated that more than 200,000 people died in the war, which was part of Washington's drive to secure unchallenged control over the region and to strengthen its position against Russia, Iran and China. Faced with spiralling costs and mass resistance to the occupying forces and the US puppet regime, the Biden administration withdrew in August 2021 and handed power back to the Taliban.

The Greens' selection of Jacobsen further exposes the fraudulent claims by the pseudo-left groups, the International Socialist Organisation and Socialist Aotearoa, that it is an anti-war party. Jacobsen speaks proudly about his participation in an illegal war aimed at transforming Afghanistan into a US colony.

According to the *Herald*, Jacobsen joined the military after leaving high school and passed selection for the NZSAS at the age of 21. He was deployed to Afghanistan in 2010 and again in 2011.

Jacobsen is unlikely to enter parliament in the November 7 election; he is ranked 25th on the Green Party list and is standing in a seat held by the conservative National Party since 1949. The *Herald* notes that if elected "he could be the first New Zealand MP to have fought as a combat soldier since the World War II generation."

The article by reporter David Fisher, which includes several comments from Jacobsen, is a piece of war propaganda. It covers up the brutal and criminal character of

the Afghan war and whitewashes the role of the NZSAS.

The Greens candidate explains that he was eager to go to Afghanistan to "put into action the skills we had been taught. And I think everyone who joins wants to help people."

Such comments make the NZSAS sound like a humanitarian aid agency. Its actual role was to terrorise the population and violently suppress the insurgency against the occupiers. Despite the secrecy surrounding NZSAS operations, the unit—like the US, British, German and Australian forces—has been implicated in war crimes.

The *Herald* refers to an inquiry established by the previous Labour Party-led government, which included the Greens, after investigative journalists revealed that six civilians were killed and 15 injured during Operation Burnham, an August 2010 raid on two villages carried out by the NZSAS and American forces.

Fisher writes ambiguously that "Jacobsen's hesitancy to discuss his service with the NZSAS means he will not acknowledge being part of the raid." Jacobsen is quoted saying that the inquiry's findings, released in 2020, "acknowledged that the actions of the people on the ground was in keeping with what New Zealanders would expect of the Defence Force."

The inquiry confirmed that civilians were killed, including a three-year-old girl—facts that the Defence Force had initially denied—but defended the deaths as collateral damage. Attorney-General David Parker described the killings as "legal."

The inquiry also confirmed that the NZSAS had breached the Geneva Convention by beating a captured insurgent and handing him over to the National Directorate of Security, which was notorious for torturing prisoners.

Reporting in November 2019 also implicated the New Zealand army in 17 Afghan civilian deaths and injuries, including the deaths of seven children, caused by unexploded bombs left behind at firing ranges in Bamyan province, where an NZ army base operated from 2003 to 2013.

Jacobsen has not publicly criticised any of the atrocities committed during the war and has repeatedly defended NZ's role in it. On August 19, 2021, he wrote on Facebook that the withdrawal from Afghanistan raised questions: "What did we achieve? And was it worth it? These conversations are well worth having. This is not the last time that the New Zealand military will be sent to war."

He then declared that soldiers had fought to end the Taliban's oppression of "women, non-Pashtuns, and non-Muslims." This is the same "humanitarian" propaganda used by successive US governments to justify aggressive wars of conquest in Afghanistan and Iraq, which killed more than a million people and destroyed entire societies.

In a more recent post, on April 3, 2026, Jacobsen wrote that "it is the values instilled in me during my time in the Navy and the Army that brought me to the Greens; serving our country, looking after each other, and leaving the place better than we found it." Jacobsen was not yet speaking publicly about having been in the NZSAS.

To describe New Zealand's role in Afghanistan as "looking after" people and "leaving the place better than we found it" is a grotesque lie.

How exactly did Jacobsen go from fighting in Afghanistan to joining the Greens? According to the *Herald*, after leaving the military he "spent time studying at a university in the United States where he met his wife," whose name and occupation are not revealed. He then spent time in "South America and Africa" before eventually moving to Jordan.

The *Herald* states: "Jacobsen's experience landed him work with the United Nations, including roles that took him inside Gaza around the time military action by Israel saw thousands killed and a humanitarian crisis that stretched into 2015 and beyond." What Jacobsen did for the UN and what he did in Gaza is not explained.

According to Jacobsen, the Greens' "brave" position on Palestine "tipped me from voting for the Greens to joining the Greens." The party's election manifesto calls for NZ to recognise the state of Palestine and impose sanctions on Israel—policies which, even if adopted, will not stop the genocide against the Palestinian people.

The party must be judged on its record. Like its Australian and German counterparts, it has consistently supported New Zealand's role as a minor imperialist power allied to the US.

The Greens voted against the Labour-Alliance government's deployment of NZSAS troops to Afghanistan in late 2001, but provided critical support for that government to stay in office. Green co-leader Jeanette Fitzsimmons made clear that the party was not against military action on principle, declaring that there "may be a place for armed forces" to be deployed if approved by the

UN.

In 2010, Green MP Keith Locke stated that he was "proud" of New Zealand's role in Afghanistan, falsely calling it a "peacekeeping" operation.

The Greens were part of the 2017–2023 Labour-led government which strengthened New Zealand's alliance with US imperialism, including by sending NZ troops to Britain to train Ukrainian conscripts for the US-NATO proxy war against Russia.

In 2019, Green Party co-leader James Shaw worked with Defence Minister Ron Mark, a member of the right-wing nationalist NZ First Party, on a policy document justifying increased military spending. New Zealand became closely integrated into US-led war preparations against China, which the Labour-Greens-NZ First government repeatedly described as the main "threat" facing the world, along with Russia.

The Greens are positioning themselves to join another Labour-led government, which will continue and deepen this militarist trajectory. Labour agrees with the current National Party-led government that the military budget must be doubled from 1 to 2 percent of GDP and recruitment expanded significantly.

The Greens' promotion of Jacobsen is part of the political establishment's efforts to overcome mass opposition to war, to encourage nationalism and to persuade young people to join the military.

New Zealand's ruling class is actively preparing to drag the country into the rapidly expanding war for the redivision of the entire world. This unfolding global catastrophe can only be stopped by building an anti-war movement of the international working class that is independent of, and opposed to, all the capitalist parties, including the Green Party and its middle class, pseudo-left cheerleaders. Workers and young people must take up the fight for the socialist reorganisation of society, to put an end to the capitalist system, which is the source of war. Those who agree with this program should contact the Socialist Equality Group.



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