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New Zealand

The United States and New Zealand work together closely in bilateral, regional, and global contexts to address common interests in the areas of defense, foreign affairs, and trade. Bilateral and multilateral military-to-military exercises involving the two countries, such as the 23 nation RIMPAC naval exercise, have increased in number since the signing of the Wellington Declaration of 2010 and the Washington Declaration of 2012. These declarations marked turning points in bilateral relations after differences over nuclear policy in the 1980s prompted the United States to suspend its alliance commitments to New Zealand (see below). The renewed strength of the bilateral relationship was also demonstrated by the 2016 visit of the USS *Sampson*, the first U.S. warship visit to New Zealand in more than 30 years. This strengthening of the relationship has been building since New Zealand's commitment of military forces to Afghanistan in 2003. In the view of many observers, this return to close cooperation puts to rest past differences over nuclear policy.

Background


New Zealand and the United States have common historical roots as settler societies of the British Empire. New Zealand, also known to New Zealanders as Aotearoa or “the land of the long white cloud,” was first settled by the Polynesian-Maori people around the tenth century. Dutch navigator Abel Tasman discovered the western coast of New Zealand in 1642, but it was English Captain James Cook who, over three expeditions in 1769, 1773, and 1777, circumnavigated and mapped the islands. The 1840 Treaty of Waitangi, between the British Crown and indigenous Maori Chiefs, serves as the basis for relations between the Maori and European communities. The British Monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, is the constitutional head of state of New Zealand. Her representative, the Governor General, acts on the advice of the New Zealand Prime Minister's Cabinet. New Zealand attained Dominion Status in 1907 and gained full political independence from Britain under the 1947 Statute of Westminster Adoption Act. In 1893, New Zealand became the first self-governing country to grant all women the right to vote.

Politics and Elections

New Zealand is a unicameral, mixed-member-proportional (MMP), parliamentary democracy. MMP was introduced in New Zealand in 1996. Under MMP, Members of Parliament come from both single-member electorates and from party lists leading to a parliament in which a party's share of the seats roughly mirrors its share of the overall vote. New Zealand does not have a state or provincial level of government. The current government, first elected in 2017 and reelected in October 2020, is led by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern of the Labour Party. Ardern's government, with 65 of 120 seats in parliament, is the first to rule in its own right since the institution of MMP. The

opposition center-right National Party is led by Judith Collins. The next election is scheduled for September 2023.

Figure 1. New Zealand in Brief

<p>Government: A constitutional monarchy with approximately 120-seat unicameral parliament.</p> <p>Head of State: Queen Elizabeth II represented by Governor-General Dame Patricia Lee Reddy</p> <p>Head of Government: Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern</p> <p>Natural resources: natural gas, iron ore, sand, coal, timber, hydropower, gold, limestone</p> <p>Natural hazards: earthquakes</p> <p>Terrain: Mountainous and plains [41% pasture, 31% forest].</p> <p>Area: About the size of Colorado</p> <p>Population: 5 million with 1.6% growth rate (2019)</p> <p>Ethnic groups: European 70.2%, Maori 16.5%, Asian 15.1%, Pacific 8.1%. (2018) [Many identify with more than one group.]</p> <p>Exports: <u>Products</u> Dairy, meat, wood, fruit. <u>Markets</u> China 28%, Australia 14.6%, U.S. 9.4%, Japan 6.9%. (2020)</p> <p>GDP: <u>Per capita</u> \$42,084 ppp (2019). <u>Sectors</u> agriculture 6%, industry 20%, services 65% with -5.7% est. growth. (2020)</p>	
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Source: CIA World Factbook and the Economist Intelligence Unit.

Ardern achieved high approval ratings as a result of her government's effective handling of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic as well as her earlier handling of the Christchurch massacre. New Zealand has the lowest COVID-19 mortality rate in the OECD with 25 deaths out of 2,162 infections. Ardern lifted all coronavirus restrictions except border controls after reporting zero active cases on June 7, 2020. Only New Zealand citizens and residents are currently allowed to enter New Zealand. New Zealand is scheduled to start receiving the Pfizer vaccine in March 2021. In 2019, a 28-year-old Australian described as a white supremacist attacked the Al Noor Mosque and Linwood Islamic Centre in Christchurch and killed 51 people. Following the attacks, parliament passed legislation outlawing military style semi-automatic weapons and assault rifles.

Climate Change

In 2019, the Ardern government passed the Zero Carbon Act with cross-party support and committed New Zealand to reduce carbon emissions to 0 by 2050. Methane from agriculture and waste, which represents over 40% of New Zealand's emissions, was exempt from the zero emissions goal, but has a separate reduction target of 24%-47% reduction below 2017 levels by 2050. In December 2020, New Zealand declared a climate emergency and committed the government to become carbon neutral by 2025. New Zealand has a renewable electricity target of 100% by 2035.

Defense and Foreign Policy

In part because New Zealand is a small nation, officials place much emphasis on multilateral processes and regional economic institutions, and Australia and the United States figure prominently in New Zealand's security affairs. New Zealand's commitment of regular troops and other assistance in support of the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Bamiyan Province, Afghanistan, from 2003 to 2013 demonstrated, according to some observers, New Zealand's value as a diplomatic and military partner. New Zealand also demonstrated such support through its deployment of military trainers in Iraq. New Zealand released a Strategic Defence Policy Statement in July 2018 that one report called "more bold and frank in terms of the Government's foreign policy position ... than anything a New Zealand government has released in recent years." The Statement observes that "As Pacific Island countries' relationships with non-traditional partners continue to develop, traditional partners such as New Zealand and Australia will be challenged to maintain influence." Specifically, the Policy Statement notes that "China's more confident assertion of its interests has at times raised tensions with neighboring states and with the United States." The statement drew objections from China.

Bilateral Relations with the United States

The gradual return of close security cooperation between the United States and New Zealand since 2003 has helped forge a new security partnership between the two countries. The two nations have fought together in many wars and conflicts and, along with Australia, established the Australia-New Zealand-United States (ANZUS) alliance in 1951. During the mid-1980s the United States suspended its alliance commitments to New Zealand as a result of differences over nuclear policy, stemming from a conflict between New Zealand legislation that made it nuclear free and the United States' policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons on U.S. Navy ships.

The Wellington Declaration of 2010 was a key turning point in United States-New Zealand relations. The Wellington Declaration stated that "our shared democratic values and common interests" will guide the two nations' collective action, and through it the United States and New Zealand agreed to emphasize the importance of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, rather than let differences over nuclear policy define the relationship. The agreement pointed to the need to address regional and global challenges including through enhanced dialogue on regional security, practical cooperation in the Pacific, Foreign Ministers meetings, political-military discussions, and cooperation on climate change, nuclear proliferation, and international extremism. The 2012 Washington Declaration on Defense Cooperation further opened the way for enhanced strategic dialogue and defense cooperation. This momentum has been sustained by subsequent U.S. and New Zealand administrations. In 2018, New Zealand announced the purchase of 4 Boeing P-8A Poseidon aircraft.

Regional Relations

New Zealand enjoys very close relations with Australia, its neighbor across the Tasman Sea. These trans-Tasman ties are based in the two nations' common origins as British colonies. These ties were strengthened as the two nations fought together in the Australian New Zealand Army Corp (ANZAC) in places like Gallipoli in World War I. This relationship evolved into what is known as the "ANZAC spirit" of close defense cooperation. The close economic, people-to-people, and cultural ties, as well as a shared love of rugby, cricket, and other sport, further reinforce bilateral relations. The two nations hope to create a "Trans-Tasman Bubble" that would allow their citizens to travel to each country without COVID-19 quarantine restrictions.

New Zealand has played a key role in promoting peace, stability, development, and the environment in the South Pacific, including in Timor-Leste, Bougainville in Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands. New Zealand worked with Australia and South Pacific nations on the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER)-Plus, a free trade accord, which came into force in December 2020. New Zealand provides disaster assistance to the region and supports the Pacific Islands Forum, the region's principal multilateral organization. New Zealand has also set aside 15% of its Exclusive Economic Zone for the Kermadec Ocean Sanctuary. In 2018 Ardern's government announced a reset of New Zealand's policy toward the Pacific that is driven in part by a view that "the Pacific has become an increasingly contested strategic space, under which New Zealand has to work harder to maintain our positive influence." In discussing the Pacific reset, former Foreign Minister Winston Peters called for a reenergized approach and stated, "There has never been a time since 1945 when Australia and New Zealand need to work together more closely in the Pacific." Observers view Nanaia Mahuta's appointment as new Foreign Minister in 2020 as signaling a continuation of previous foreign policy priorities.

Relations with China

A key challenge for New Zealand is balancing concerns over China's growing influence with China's role as its largest export destination. New Zealand's goods exports to China quadrupled since the signing of a bilateral Free Trade Agreement between the two countries in 2008. In 2015, New Zealand became a founding member of the China-led Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). On March 27, 2017, New Zealand signed a memorandum of understanding with China on China's One Belt, One Road initiative. More recently, diplomatic relations between New Zealand and China have become somewhat strained, in part due to rising concerns about Chinese influence in New Zealand and the region. In November 2018, New Zealand's Government Communications Security Bureau stopped a New Zealand telecommunications provider from using Huawei equipment. In May 2020, former Foreign Minister Peters expressed his view that Taiwan should be able to rejoin the World Health Organization.

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