

NATO ENLARGEMENT: From the North Atlantic to the South Pacific

Encompassing Australia and New Zealand

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Global Research, June 05, 2012

[Stop NATO](#) 5 June 2012

Region: [Asia](#), [Oceania](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

On June 4 NATO's Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and New Zealand's Prime Minister John Key signed a partnership agreement at NATO Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium.

As the Western military bloc reported, the Individual Partnership Cooperation Programme conferred on the South Pacific nation "formalised ties between the two sides after almost two decades of increased cooperation."

After meeting with Prime Minister Key, Rasmussen said, "Partnerships are essential to NATO's success and we want to be even more closely connected with countries that are willing to contribute to global security where we all have a stake."

The increasing use of the word global by the U.S.-dominated military alliance - New Zealand was recently announced to be a member of its newest partnership category, partners across the globe - leaves no room for doubt regarding the emergence of NATO as a self-designated international military force, history's first, and its intention to assume so-called out-of-area missions much farther from the territory of its member states than previous military campaigns and operations in the Balkans, South Asia, North Africa and the Indian Ocean.

New Zealand has supplied troops for the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan since 2003. Speaking on the June 4th accord, the NATO chief affirmed, "This arrangement is a move to capitalise on this engagement, and formalise the current, more substantive relationship that exists between NATO and New Zealand."

He also claimed: "We may be far away geographically, but we are linked by common values and commitment. NATO looks forward to building on this important partnership in the years to come."

Rasmussen mentioned that areas of joint cooperation, in addition to the ongoing war in Afghanistan, will include cyber-defence, disaster relief, crisis management and joint education and training. That is, NATO training the New Zealand Defence Force.

The common values alluded to comprise much more than the parliamentary system of government, which exists most everywhere in the world, and instead are a veiled reference to the fact that NATO is what it has always been: A military alliance of the former colonial powers in Europe and Britain's past outposts in North America - the U.S. and Canada - now to be complemented by those in the South Pacific, New Zealand and Australia.

On the same day that he met with New Zealand's Key, the NATO secretary general announced that he was paying his first visit to nearby Australia, in the words of an earlier report from the Sydney Morning Herald, to sign "a high level political declaration" to consolidate military ties with that nation.

Prime Minister Key and his Australian counterpart Julia Gillard attended the NATO summit in Chicago last month and were among 13 "partner countries from across the globe" (NATO's term) that the heads of state and government of the alliance's 28 member states met with there, the others being Austria, Finland, Georgia, Japan, Jordan, Morocco, Qatar, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates. Japan has been mentioned as the next focus of NATO's attention after Australia and New Zealand.

In regard to New Zealand's new Individual Partnership Cooperation Programme, the NATO website reported that the bloc "has similar partnership programmes with Switzerland and Sweden among others." Mongolia was granted what NATO at the time called an Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme in March.

Rasmussen's visit to Australia will be the latest, and most pronounced, step in the solidification of military ties between NATO and Canberra that began with Rasmussen's predecessor, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, paying the first-ever visit by a NATO chief to the country in 2005. Rasmussen's trip will also follow President Barack Obama's visit to Australia last November during which he announced the deployment of 2,500 U.S. Marines to the north of the nation, as NATO's new partnership with New Zealand follows the recent renewal of military relations between that country and the U.S. after a 25-year hiatus.

This January Kevin Rudd, former Australian prime minister and at the time foreign minister, visited NATO Headquarters to accredit his country's first ambassador to NATO, Dr. Brendan Nelson. On January 20 Rudd's website announced that "Dr Nelson's appointment as Ambassador represents a deepening of Australia's engagement with NATO."

Australia has provided NATO with troops for campaigns in the Balkans and in Afghanistan, where with 1,550 soldiers it is the largest non-NATO force contributor, and participates in NATO's Operation Ocean Shield naval mission off the coast of Somalia.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is indeed what is has frequently been characterized as being: the military arm of the policy of the West versus the rest, with West defined as consisting of "common values and commitment," however "far away geographically" its 28 members and over 40 partners may be.

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