



## 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 November 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

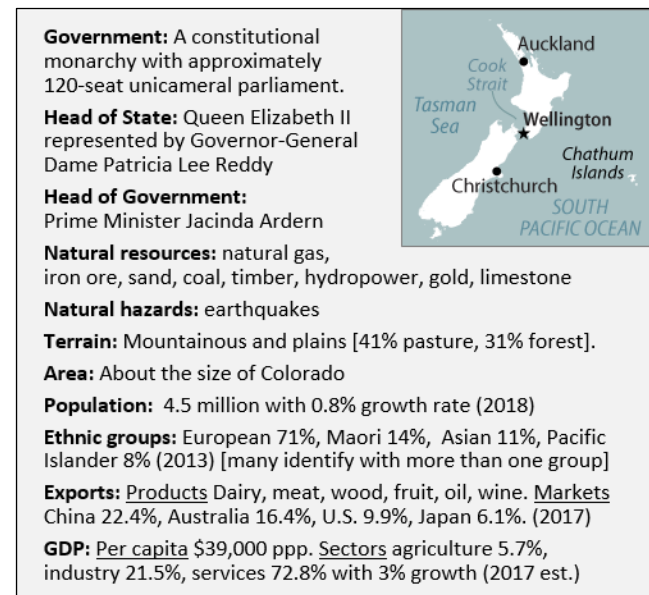
New Zealand and the United States have common historical roots as settler societies of the British Empire. New Zealand, also known to New Zealanders as Aotearoa or “the land of the long white cloud,” was first settled by the Polynesian-Maori people around the tenth century. Dutch navigator Abel Tasman 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 is a coalition of the Labour Party, led by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, and the New Zealand First Party, led by Winston Peters. This coalition has a confidence and supply agreement with the Green Party and has been in power since October 2017. The

opposition center-right National Party is led by Todd Muller. The next election is scheduled for September 2020.

Figure 1. New Zealand in Brief



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. Ardern lifted all coronavirus restrictions except border controls after reporting zero active cases on June 7, 2020. Observers expect that Labour will increase its seats in parliament following the September 2020 election. June 2020 projections estimate that GDP growth will be -3.5% in 2020 and then increase to 1.7% growth in 2021.

### Christchurch Massacre

A 28-year-old Australian man, who has been described as a white supremacist, attacked the Al Noor Mosque and Linwood Islamic Centre in Christchurch, New Zealand, on March 15, 2019. Fifty-one people were killed in the attacks. Following the attacks, parliament passed legislation outlawing military style semi-automatic weapons and assault rifles.

### Defense and Foreign Policy

In part because New Zealand is a small nation, officials place much emphasis on multilateral processes and institutions. They also place emphasis on regional economic institutions, and Australia and the United States figure prominently in New Zealand's national 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 an apolitical, 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, and its singling out of countries, than anything a New Zealand government has released in recent years.” The Policy 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 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 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 positive momentum has been sustained by subsequent administrations. In July 2018, New Zealand announced the purchase of four 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 origin 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 between these two states. New Zealand and Australia hope to create a “Trans-Tasman Bubble” that would allow their citizens to travel to each country without quarantine restrictions related to COVID-19.

New Zealand has played a key role in promoting peace, stability, development, and the environment in the South Pacific, including by promoting security in Timor-Leste, Bougainville, New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands. New Zealand is working with Australia and other nations in the South Pacific on the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER)–Plus, a free trade accord. New Zealand provides disaster assistance to the region and supports the Pacific Islands Forum, the region’s principal multilateral organization. New Zealand has protested Japan’s decision to resume whaling in the Southern Ocean, and has set aside 15% of New Zealand’s Exclusive Economic Zone for the Kermadec Ocean Sanctuary.

In February 2018 Prime Minister Jacinda 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, Deputy Prime Minister and 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.”

## Relations with China

Trade is at the core of New Zealand’s relationship with China, its largest trading partner. New Zealand’s goods exports to China quadrupled since the signing of a bilateral Free Trade Agreement between the two countries in 2008. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang visited New Zealand in March 2017 reportedly to discuss an FTA upgrade and the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative, which is now known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). On March 27, 2017, New Zealand signed a memorandum of understanding with China on China’s OBOR initiative. In 2015, New Zealand became a founding member of the China-led Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

Diplomatic relations between New Zealand and China have become somewhat strained, in part due to rising concerns about Chinese influence in New Zealand and its region. Prime Minister Ardern made her first official visit to China in April 2019. In November 2018, New Zealand’s Government Communications Security Bureau stopped a New Zealand telecommunications provider from using Huawei equipment. In May 2020, Winston Peters expressed his view that Taiwan should be able to rejoin the World Health Organization. China responded by warning that this position risked damaging relations. A key challenge for New Zealand is balancing concerns over China’s growing influence with China’s role as New Zealand’s largest export destination.

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