

Five Eyes: Is the alliance in trouble over China?

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The Five Eyes group has successfully shared intelligence between Western powers for decades

The Five Eyes alliance is an intelligence-sharing arrangement between five English-speaking democracies: the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. It evolved during the Cold War as a mechanism for monitoring the Soviet Union and sharing classified intelligence. It is often described as the world's most successful intelligence alliance. But recently it has suffered an embarrassing setback.

Four of the members have jointly condemned **China's treatment of its Uyghur population in Xinjiang province**. They have also expressed concern over China's de facto military takeover of the South China Sea, its suppression of democracy in Hong Kong and **its threatening moves towards Taiwan, which China has vowed to "take back" by 2049**. One country, though, has opted out of confronting China: New Zealand.

Surprisingly, perhaps, for a nation that prides itself on respect for human rights, New Zealand's Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta declined to join in this Western condemnation of Beijing, saying "it felt uncomfortable" with expanding the alliance's role by putting pressure on China in this way. Although New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern admitted on Monday that its differences with China are becoming "harder to reconcile", the country still prefers to pursue its own bilateral relations with Beijing.



Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta declined to join in Western condemnation of Beijing

China's state media has made much of this, talking of a wedge been driven between the two neighbours and allies, Australia and New Zealand.

China is New Zealand's largest export market; New Zealand depends on China for close to 30% of its exports, mostly dairy products. So does Australia, but the two Antipodean neighbours clearly view China's policies in a very different light.

Australia's federal government in Canberra has vetoed a major Chinese investment in the state of Victoria which was to be part of Beijing's "Belt and Road" initiative, its growing acquisition of economic assets around the world.

Meanwhile, China has imposed a series of damaging trade sanctions on Australia over the past year.

As the trade war between the two countries worsens, Australia's wine exports to China have reportedly dropped by 96% from the first quarter of 2020 compared to the first quarter of this year, from A\$325m (£181m) to just A\$12m (£6.6m). New Zealand, on the other hand, has been rewarded by Beijing with ever-closer trade relations.



New Zealand's Jacinda Ardern has taken a different China stance to Australia's Scott Morrison

So what exactly has all this got to do with intelligence-sharing? Very little, is the answer.