

# New Zealand PM re-affirms commitment to war drive against Syria

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Addressing the UN General Assembly on September 26, New Zealand Prime Minister John Key re-affirmed the National Party government's support for the US drive to war against Syria. Key denounced the UN Security Council's "lack of agreement," which he said had rendered it a "powerless bystander to the Syrian tragedy" and "shielded the Assad regime." His remarks were regarded as an attack on Russia and China, which vetoed UN resolutions that would have paved the way for military intervention.

Key repeated Washington's false claim that the UN investigation "makes it very clear" that the August 21 chemical weapons attack in Damascus was carried out "by the Syrian regime" and called for it to be "brought to account." In fact, the UN inspectors' report gave no indication of which side was responsible, but merely established that chemical weapons had been used. Russia and Syria insist that the US-backed "rebels" staged the attack to create the pretext for US military intervention.

Key's speech underscored the commitment of New Zealand ruling elite to the military alliance with the US. Support for US militarism seeks to ensure Washington's backing for New Zealand's own neo-colonial operations in the Pacific, where NZ businesses face increasing competition from China. The opposition Labour Party and the Greens also back regime change in Syria. While both the government and the opposition parties have called for a UN mandate, Key previously stated that he would consider supporting a unilateral US attack.

On the same day as Key's speech, the UN Security Council adopted a deal negotiated between the US and Russia to destroy Syria's chemical weapons. This represented a temporary retreat by the Obama administration in the face of overwhelming public

opposition to war within the US and internationally. For weeks the US had threatened to bombard Syria to support the Al Qaeda-linked militias seeking to topple Assad.

The resolution only delayed the prospect of war. Washington can readily exploit the inspection process to manufacture a pretext for stepping-up the regime-change operation it has been directing in Syria for more than two years. The real purpose of its intervention is to consolidate US dominance over the energy-rich Middle East. Addressing the UN on September 24, Obama defended preparations for war, stating that the US "is prepared to use all elements of our power, including military force, to secure our core interests" in the Middle East and Africa, including "the free flow of energy from the region."

Key made clear that his government supports this agenda. He told reporters on September 27 that the resolution to dismantle Syria's chemical weapons was a "positive step," but complained that it "doesn't specifically spell out how it would hold the regime to account... It doesn't allow for force." He criticised the lack of a Chapter 7 resolution, which would authorise military intervention if the regime violated the disarmament plan.

There is no substantive difference between the government's warmongering and the position of the main opposition parties. Recently-installed Labour leader David Cunliffe made no criticism of Key's speech. Last month he told TVNZ he supported New Zealand "playing its part" in an attack on Syria "under a UN mandate." On September 8, Labour's foreign affairs spokesman David Shearer recommended supporting "the Security Council in creating the space for whatever retaliatory action needs to happen."

Labour's defence spokesman Phil Goff has

repeatedly called for the ousting of Assad and denounced Russian opposition to an attack. In August, he told Radio NZ that Assad could not be allowed to “act with impunity,” declaring that “even Adolf Hitler didn’t use chemical weapons in the Second World War.”

Labour has a long record of support for US militarism. The 1999–2008 Labour government, backed by the Greens and the Alliance Party, sent troops to assist the invasion of Afghanistan and the occupation of Iraq—illegal wars launched on the basis of lies about terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.

The Greens have adopted a “pacifist” posture, calling for “non-military” action to prosecute and disarm Assad’s regime. Notwithstanding this, the Greens, like their co-thinkers in Germany and elsewhere, have made perfectly clear their support for a US war. The party’s foreign affairs spokesman Kennedy Graham repeatedly attacked China and Russia for vetoing UN resolutions that would have authorised US military action.

On September 18, Graham wrote approvingly that the UN Security Council could “take any action, including military as a last resort” to address the “threat” posed by Syria’s chemical weapons. In other words, the Greens would support attacks on Syria, “as a last resort”, provided it is UN-approved.

In a blog post on September 23, Graham endorsed Washington’s pretext for war, writing that “Western states have ‘high confidence’ (the highest level short of confirmation) that the Syrian government forces deployed [chemical] weapons.” He hailed the Russian-US deal to destroy the weapons as a “major step forward,” while noting that “non-compliance ‘should result’ in chapter VII measures being adopted by the Council”—in other words, military force. On September 27, he wrote that Key “should be commended” for denouncing the use of the veto in his speech.

The pseudo-left groups Fightback, Socialist Aotearoa and the International Socialist Organisation, have remained silent on Key’s speech and the other parties’ pro-war statements. Like their international counterparts, these organisations are advocates for US imperialism. While nominally opposing a US attack, they all support the reactionary Islamist militias in Syria, who are funded and armed by the US and its allies to oust Assad, and whose leaders have urged US military intervention.



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