

# New Zealand government, opposition support US war in Middle East

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On September 11, nine days ahead of New Zealand's election, Prime Minister John Key and the main opposition Labour Party leader David Cunliffe both declared their support for the Obama administration's decision to escalate Washington's renewed military intervention in the Middle East.

Cunliffe told the media that US air strikes in Iraq were "lawful" because of an invitation from the Iraqi government—which is nothing but a stooge of Washington. Key said the bombing was necessary to combat extremist Islamic State militias (also known as ISIS or ISIL) that have seized parts of Iraq and Syria.

Key added that he had not "formed a view" on whether to support US intervention in Syria, but said any action against ISIS was "in the interests of making a safer world." Last year, the government, Labour and the Greens all denounced Russia and China for preventing the UN Security Council from authorising a direct military attack on the Assad regime in Syria.

The NZ leaders' statements followed US President Obama's announcement of an open-ended war in Iraq and Syria, on the fraudulent pretext of fighting terrorism. In fact, ISIS is the product of Washington's backing for Al Qaeda-linked jihadist "rebels" in Libya and Syria, as well as the promotion of sectarian divisions following the Bush administration's 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Now the atrocities carried out by the Sunni extremist group are being used as the justification to consolidate American control of Iraq and intervene directly in Syria to escalate the war for regime change in that country. The long-standing aim of US imperialism is to dominate both countries and their resources, in preparation for a confrontation with Iran and Russia.

New Zealand's corporate media, like its counterparts in the US, Australia and Europe, has faithfully agitated

for bombing Iraq "to save minorities from being slaughtered by the terrorist soldiers" (*Dominion Post* editorial, September 5). A *New Zealand Herald* editorial on August 29 also warned against any "accommodation" with the Assad regime and called for more weapons to be given to Syria's "moderate" Islamist rebels.

Amid this pro-war propaganda, the official opposition parties and their liberal and pseudo-left supporters are conspiring to prevent the US intervention in the Middle East from becoming an election issue. In three televised debates between Key and Cunliffe, and two involving the minor party leaders, discussion of foreign policy, particularly military ties with Washington, was avoided.

Labour's political allies—the Greens, the right-wing populist NZ First, and the Internet-Mana Party—have remained silent on its statements supporting US bombing. There is a simple explanation for this: they all fundamentally agree with Labour.

The Greens' most recent statement on Iraq, on June 22, criticised Key's support for US intervention, only to call for UN-backed "multilateral action" instead. The party last year repeatedly called for the UN to approve an attack on Syria.

The Maori nationalist Mana Party and its ally the Internet Party have said nothing about Iraq for almost three months. On June 25, Mana leader Hone Harawira criticised Key for being prepared to support "an American crusade which has already killed thousands of Iraqi kids." At the same time, he called on the government to stand "with the independent nations of the world in condemning human rights abuses in Iraq and supporting efforts to reduce violence in that area of the world." This deliberately vague formulation left the door open to supporting intervention as part of a

supposedly multilateral “effort” to defend “human rights.”

A particularly insidious role is played by the pseudo-left groups Socialist Aotearoa (SA), the International Socialist Organisation (ISO) and Fightback, which are all part of the Internet-Mana Party (IMP) and fraudulently promote it as “progressive.” These groups are campaigning to boost the IMP’s presence in parliament so that it can prop up a Labour-led government.

In their election coverage, all three groups have echoed Labour and the media’s criticisms of the National government for colluding with right-wing bloggers to smear political opponents—a practice that is common to all bourgeois parties. None of them have commented on Labour’s support for war in Iraq.

A decade ago, the pseudo-left groups, or their previous incarnations, were postured as opponents of the invasion of Iraq and were active in anti-war protests, which attracted thousands of people. Greens MPs also fronted the protests, while continuing to support the Labour government, which sent 60 soldiers to assist the occupation force.

In recent years, however, particularly following the economic crisis that began in 2008, these groups and their counterparts internationally have shifted further to the right and become open supporters of US imperialism. While describing themselves as socialist, they in fact represent a middle class layer, including trade union bureaucrats, academics and Maori entrepreneurs, which has no interest in abolishing capitalism and ultimately benefits from the economic and strategic dominance of US imperialism.

The ISO, SA and Fightback all published statements in 2012 and 2013 supporting the US-funded militias in the war to oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. This year the Mana Party—with the pseudo-lefts’ tacit support—voted for two parliamentary motions which denounced Russia over the civil war in Ukraine and aligned with the regime in Kiev, which was installed in a US-backed, fascist-led coup in February.

The pseudo-lefts have latched onto Mana and the Internet Party in an attempt to gain a place for themselves within the political establishment, on the basis of nationalist and racial identity politics. The Internet Party is openly pro-business, while Mana represents indigenous capitalists. Since 2012, Mana has

campaigned alongside Labour, the Greens and NZ First against foreign investment, particularly from China, which is NZ’s number one trading partner. Mana has also sought to divide the working class by scapegoating immigrants, who are largely from Asia, for unemployment and high house prices.

Anti-Chinese politics, which has been a significant feature of the opposition parties’ election campaign, dovetails with the needs of US imperialism. The Obama administration has enlisted all its allies in the Asia-Pacific, including New Zealand, in its “pivot to Asia,” a strategy to militarily encircle China. The pseudo-left outfits have not only remained silent on Mana’s anti-Chinese statements; they all falsely label China as “imperialist,” thereby lining up directly or indirectly with the US military build-up in the Asia Pacific.

Whichever party leads the next government, it will proceed with the backing of the pseudo-lefts, Internet-Mana and the Greens to further strengthen ties with US imperialism and support its reckless operations in every part of the world.



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