

New Zealand government and opposition back US war in Syria

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New Zealand's National Party government joined the chorus of US allies hailing President Donald Trump's missile strike on Syria and beating the drum for increased US military intervention in the war-torn country.

Prime Minister Bill English told the media on April 7 the US decision to launch 59 cruise missiles against the Shayrat airfield was a "proportionate" response to Bashar al-Assad's regime's "chemical weapons" attack in Idlib. He said "we would consider" sending troops to Syria if a US request was made. The US actions increase the danger of a catastrophic war against not only Assad but his government's allies, Iran and Russia.

Last week the Trump administration, joined by the Democrats and the corporate media, seized on video footage of children allegedly killed in the Idlib attack as the pretext for military action. The claims are unsubstantiated and dubious. The Assad regime, which is on the verge of defeating the US-backed "rebel" groups, has no motive for using chemical weapons (see: "Syria's alleged gas attack: An imperialist provocation").

Foreign Minister Murray McCully described the actions of the Assad regime as "outrageous" and "horrific," adding: "It is critical that the international community emphatically demand an end to this violence, and that the Syrian government be held to account."

The professions of horror and outrage, echoed throughout the media, are entirely hypocritical. Needless to say, there have been no similar statements about the victims of thousands of US and allied bombs in Iraq and Syria, or the slaughter of civilians by US and Iraqi troops in Mosul, which New Zealand's government fully supports.

Defence Minister Gerry Brownlee revealed he was informed "an hour or two" in advance of the impending US missile attack. New Zealand is a member of the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing alliance led by the US. The ruling elite has depended on its alliance with US imperialism, since the Second World War, to advance its own neo-colonial interests in the Pacific and throughout the world.

There are currently around 140 New Zealand soldiers stationed in Iraq, ostensibly in a non-combat capacity, training Iraqi forces. According to some reports—denied by the government—New Zealand Special Air Service (SAS) commandos have been involved in combat operations in Iraq.

New Zealand has also played an active role in the Afghanistan war, under both Labour and National Party-led governments. Prime Minister English has brushed aside recent revelations that an NZSAS raid on two defenceless Afghan villages in 2010 resulted in 21 civilian casualties, including the death of a three-year-old girl.

Opposition Labour Party leader Andrew Little echoed the government's support for aggression against Syria, saying: "We cannot let the use of chemical weapons in violation of international law happen without consequence." His only reservation was that any action "should comply with UN resolutions and we do not want a repeat of what happened in Iraq."

In fact, the 1999–2008 Labour government supported the Bush administration's war in Iraq by sending 60 New Zealand army engineers to assist the occupying forces.

Labour's ally the Greens criticised the US airstrike for being "hasty" and "unilateral." Its foreign affairs spokesman Kennedy Graham stated: "No wrong has ever been righted, no child has ever been protected and

no conflict has ever been solved by launching missiles.” The same statement, however, made clear that the Greens would support a “multilateral” intervention approved by the United Nations. Graham attacked Russia and China for vetoing UN Security Council resolutions designed to pave the way for intervention in Syria.

There is widespread anti-war sentiment in the working class. A Facebook poll by TVNZ, asking whether New Zealand should join US action in Syria, found after the first four hours “3,429 had answered ‘no’ with just 336 saying ‘yes’.”

One comment on the poll referred to “the litany of lies” used by the US to start previous wars. The commenter, Frank, listed the Gulf of Tonkin attack used as a pretext for war in Vietnam, false reports of babies “thrown from incubators” in Kuwait in the lead-up to the first Gulf War in 1991, and fabricated claims of “weapons of mass destruction” used to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

On the other hand, the middle class pseudo-left organisations, orbiting the trade union bureaucracy, academia and the opposition parties, are increasingly open in their support for imperialist war.

Syrian Solidarity New Zealand, a pro-intervention group heavily promoted by the media, supported Trump’s missile strike. Its spokesman Ali Akil told Radio NZ the attack was “one step in the right direction six years late. On its own, it’s not really going to do anything. If it is followed up then it might have an effect.”

Syrian Solidarity NZ is also promoted by the pseudo-left groups Fightback, Socialist Aotearoa and the International Socialist Organisation.

None of these groups has published a statement denouncing Trump’s missile strike and the New Zealand government’s support for it. All of them have instead lined up behind the US war for regime change and threats of war against Russia (see: “New Zealand pseudo-lefts hold protests to denounce Russia”).

Prominent Fightback member Daphne Lawless wrote on Facebook on April 7 that Trump “going after Assad would be like Joe Stalin going after Hitler—a good thing, on balance, done by a disgusting monster.”

She followed this absurd analogy by declaring that opponents of US intervention were “in the red-brown camp alongside the fascists and Vlad Putin. It remains

to see what any Trumpist intervention in Syria would look like—it may be sensible and relatively successful like Libya or a clusterf..k like Iraq. But I doubt the father of the twin toddlers who were chlorine-gassed in Idlib by their own government is opposed to rolling the dice.”

One could hardly give a more explicit endorsement of US imperialism and denunciation of its opponents. For years the pseudo-lefts have falsely promoted the anti-Assad “rebels,” which are dominated by Al Qaeda-linked forces and funded by the US and its allies, as leaders of a “revolution.”

A genuine anti-war movement must be built based on internationalism and socialism, to stop the drive toward a Third World War. This can be done only in opposition to the entire capitalist political establishment, including the pseudo-left cheerleaders for imperialism.



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