

New Zealand government would “consider” joining US war against North Korea

Tom Peters
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Following US President Donald Trump’s threats of nuclear war against North Korea, New Zealand Prime Minister Bill English told the media on August 11: “If there was any military action at all we would consider our contribution on its merits.”

English said, “We’re in close contact with the US and Australia,” adding only that “any decision New Zealand makes about North Korea we make according to our own interests.”

Two days earlier English made a mild criticism of Trump’s threat to unleash “fire and fury like the world has never seen.” English said Trump’s statement was “not helpful when the situation is so tense” and “more likely to escalate than to settle things.”

English’s cautious comments contrast with the unqualified commitment given by Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull. “In terms of defence, we are joined at the hip” with the US, Turnbull said, and “we would come to their aid” in a war. Turnbull was immediately supported by the Labor Party.

Nevertheless, New Zealand’s government is “considering” dragging the country into a war, without any public debate and behind the backs of the population.

For the ruling and opposition parties, the danger of war that menaces the world’s population has been the great unmentionable in their campaigns for the election, scheduled for September 23. The working class and young people overwhelmingly oppose war and the Trump administration, but their views find no political expression within the establishment parties.

The National, Labour and Green parties have not released election statements on foreign policy or defence, but all agreed last year on a \$20 billion increase in military spending over the next 15 years to improve “interoperability” between New Zealand and

US forces. Meanwhile, all parties are committed to deepening austerity measures to attack the working class at home.

The basis for a US war against North Korea and its only ally, China, was prepared by the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia.” The entire New Zealand political establishment supported this strategy to militarily encircle and threaten China. The government remains concerned about antagonising China, which is New Zealand’s main trading partner. Nonetheless, successive governments have strengthened military and intelligence ties with the US.

The media has noted that New Zealand, unlike Australia, is not a formal US ally and not obligated to join a US war. New Zealand has been excluded from the ANZUS defence alliance since the mid-1980s, when the Labour Party government imposed an anti-nuclear policy that effectively banned US navy ship visits.

New Zealand, however, is a minor imperialist power which has relied on a de facto alliance with the US since the end of World War II to defend its own predatory interests in the Pacific and other parts of the world.

The rift with Washington in the 1980s was mainly for public posturing. While spouting pacifist rhetoric, the Labour government opened the powerful Waihopai spy base in the South Island and strengthened intelligence collaboration with the US. New Zealand is a partner in the US-led Five Eyes spy alliance and, as Edward Snowden revealed, New Zealand’s Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB) spies on China on behalf of the US National Security Agency.

Military collaboration expanded under the 1999-2008 Labour government of Helen Clark and the current National government, which both sent troops to

Afghanistan and Iraq. Last year the government, supported by Labour and the Greens, hosted a US warship visit for the first time since the 1980s—another sign of closer military relations.

New Zealand regularly joins military exercises with the US, aimed at preparing for war with China. The NZ Air Force has just completed an anti-submarine warfare exercise in Guam, alongside US and Japanese forces. After the North Korean regime responded to Trump by threatening to launch missiles into waters near Guam, NZ's Defence Force confirmed on August 10 it would not withdraw from the exercise.

An official propaganda campaign, connected with the centenary of the First World War, is underway in Australia and New Zealand to prepare the population and especially young people for future wars. Significantly, during this year's Anzac Day commemorations on April 25, Governor-General Patsy Reddy praised New Zealand's involvement in the Korean War, in which 4,700 NZ soldiers participated.

In another recent attempt to whip up pro-war sentiment, Foreign Minister Gerry Brownlee provocatively declared on June 12 that Pyongyang was developing a missile that could hit New Zealand as well as the US. Brownlee demonised North Korean leader Kim Jong-un as "irrational ... nuts and not a sort of person that you'd want to have with a finger anywhere near the trigger of a nuclear weapon."

On August 9, Labour Party foreign affairs spokesman David Parker hypocritically told the *New Zealand Herald* that Trump's statements on North Korea were "as silly as the shock-and-awe language that was used by George Bush before invading Iraq, which has already led to more than a decade of war."

However, the opposition parties have not opposed English's comment that New Zealand would join a US war with North Korea. Parker echoed Washington's demand for Russia and China to increase "economic pressure on North Korea."



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