

New Zealand government supports imperialist assault on Syria

John Braddock, Tom Peters
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New Zealand Labour Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern declared on April 14 that New Zealand “accepted” the US-British-French missile strikes on Syria. Ardern revealed that her government had been informed about the attack hours in advance.

Ardern repeated the justifications put forward by the US, UK and France for the missile attacks, claiming they had “responded to the grave violation of international law, and the abhorrent use of chemical weapons against civilians.” The action was intended to prevent “further such atrocities being committed,” she said.

This is a farrago of lies. The attack on Syria was an illegal act of aggression. US President Trump, French President Macron and British Prime Minister May, whose governments lack any popular support, are presiding over yet another imperialist war crime, which poses the immense danger of opening up a major war with nuclear-armed Russia.

The pretext for the attack on Syria was the unproven allegation that President Bashar al-Assad’s military used banned chemical weapons against US-backed militias in the city of Douma. The claims are based on dubious footage made by the pro-US White Helmets, whose forces were on the verge of being defeated by the Syrian regime, which had no military reason to carry out such an attack.

The real motive of Washington and its allies is to assert their strategic position in the Middle East, which has been weakened by Russian and Iranian intervention that stymied the US regime-change operation in Syria. The Syrian war is leading toward a direct US confrontation with Russia, which Washington this year declared to be its main strategic competitor alongside China.

The response of New Zealand’s Labour-led

government underscores that it, no less than the previous National Party government, is prepared to take the country into a catastrophic war in support of its US and European allies.

Asked if she would send troops to Syria, Ardern did not rule it out, telling reporters: “That’s a hypothetical. We haven’t been asked.” Her government has kept more than 100 New Zealand soldiers in Iraq and a handful in Afghanistan.

Ardern denounced Russia for vetoing UN Security Council resolutions that would have paved the way for a UN-backed military intervention. She said she would discuss the war with French, German and British leaders during an upcoming visit to Europe.

The Labour Party, far from being a “progressive” alternative to National, as presented by liberal, trade union and pseudo-left commentators, is a pro-imperialist party. It supports the closest alliance with Australia, the US and European powers in order to ensure their support for the NZ ruling elite’s own neo-colonial operations in the Pacific.

Labour agreed with the previous National Party government’s announcement in 2016 that \$20 billion would be spent to upgrade the military over 15 years to make it “inter-operable” with the US and other allies. At the same time, Labour is continuing to underfund basic services such as healthcare, housing and education.

The Labour-Green-New Zealand First coalition government was installed following last September’s election with Washington’s support, in order to align New Zealand’s foreign policy even more closely with the US.

While Labour and the right-wing populist NZ First were negotiating their coalition agreement, US ambassador Scott Brown publicly criticised the

National Party government's reluctance to endorse Trump's threats to annihilate North Korea. He made clear that the Trump administration expected a firmer pro-US stance from the next government.

Shortly after becoming prime minister, Ardern said she would be prepared to support an attack on North Korea. She and Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters have also denounced Chinese investment and diplomatic activity in the Pacific.

Earlier this month, following pressure from Britain's high commissioner, the government abandoned efforts to restart trade negotiations with Russia. Ardern and Peters, who is also foreign minister and NZ First leader, expressed support for the British government's belligerent stance against Moscow, echoing its lie that it had proof Moscow organised the poisoning of Russian double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia.

The working class is overwhelmingly antiwar. A poll of more than 3,700 people by TVNZ last year found 90 percent opposed New Zealand involvement in Syria. Yet this opposition finds no expression in the political establishment.

The Green Party, which is part of the government, cynically attempted to distance itself from Ardern's embrace of the assault on Syria. One MP, Golriz Ghahraman, wrote on the *Spinoff* that the attack was "a continuation of a policy that protects American and western interests and a breach of international law."

Greens co-leader James Shaw quickly downplayed the column, telling the bFM radio station on April 16: "I agree with both the prime minister and with Golriz." He said the missile strikes were "unlawful" and the war in Syria had been "made worse" by US support and training for anti-Assad forces. However, Shaw echoed the unsubstantiated claims that the Syrian military carried out the Douma chemical attack.

The Greens supported the 1999-2008 Labour government, which strengthened New Zealand's alliance with Washington. Labour sent SAS forces to join the US-led invasion of Afghanistan following the September 2001 attack on the World Trade Center, and a contingent of army engineers to support the occupation of Iraq.

The Greens initially opposed the invasion of Afghanistan, but later supported New Zealand's participation in the war, which the party fraudulently

presented as "peacekeeping." Today, the Green Party is once again propping up a Labour government and seeking to provide a "progressive" coloration to its support for war in the Middle East and elsewhere.

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