

# New Zealand prime minister strengthens military ties with France

Tom Peters  
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Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's visit to Paris, Berlin and London, from April 14 to 23, has been used by the New Zealand and international media to once again laud her and the Labour Party-led government.

Ardern's meeting with Queen Elizabeth II, during which she wore a traditional Maori cloak, was reported prominently by the *Guardian*, BBC and CNN, among others. The German and French media gushed over her pregnancy. On April 20, *Time* magazine named Ardern one of the world's 100 most influential people, asserting that by choosing "both motherhood and a career" she was "changing the game" for "women and girls around the world."

Ardern's talks with French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Britain's Theresa May were largely aimed at securing trade agreements with the EU and Britain. Ardern also sought increased military cooperation with France and Britain in the Pacific, where Australia's and New Zealand's ruling elites are seeking to push back against China's growing strategic and economic influence.

A *New Zealand Herald* editorial on April 20 noted that "both Merkel and Macron sound supportive of an early EU trade agreement with this country." The newspaper said Ardern came across as "a bright, youthful, charming mother to be," noting that she "strengthened her position" in favour of military action against Syria.

Ardern repeatedly stressed her support for the US-French-British missile strikes against Syria and echoed their belligerent rhetoric against Russia. She told TVNZ on April 22: "We accept the decision made by the US, the UK and France," adding that there was "very little option in terms of standing up and giving a response to the use of chemical weapons."

Ardern denounced Russia for vetoing resolutions in

the United Nations Security Council that would have paved the way for intervention against its Syrian ally.

Asked by reporter Joy Reid what she made of journalist "Robert Fisk's doubts about whether a chemical attack even occurred in Syria," Ardern said France had "sufficient evidence," without elaborating. In fact, numerous interviews and reports from Douma have exposed the incident as a fabrication.

The Syrian and Russian governments claimed that the British- and US-backed White Helmets staged the attack to provide a pretext for Western intervention. For seven years the US and its allies such as Saudi Arabia have funded Islamist militias to fight to overthrow the Russian and Iranian-backed regime.

The New Zealand government has joined in the wave of anti-Russia propaganda. While Ardern was in Europe, New Zealand's spy agency, the Government Communications Security Bureau—which works closely with the US National Security Agency as part of the Five Eyes alliance—publicly declared that "Russian state-sponsored" hackers had carried out cyber-attacks in New Zealand. No details or evidence were provided.

Ardern's meeting with Macron was trumpeted as a success by NZ's corporate media. In a joint statement, the New Zealand and French leaders promised "to champion progressive and inclusive trade that builds prosperity, promotes the highest social, environmental and health standards, and supports sustainable development."

The NZ prime minister made no criticism of Macron's attacks on democratic rights, calls to reintroduce the draft, and austerity policies that have triggered mass strikes and protests. Ardern told the *Herald* she found the right-wing former investment banker Macron "incredibly interesting and thoughtful." She invited Macron to visit New Zealand, which would

make him the first French president to do so.

The leaders emphasised that New Zealand and France were “allies during two World Wars” and would promote their shared military history. Their statement pledged to “enhance security and defence cooperation” in the Middle East, Africa, South East Asia and the Pacific region, where French colonies are “close neighbours” to New Zealand.

The two countries would strengthen cooperation on “maritime surveillance in the Pacific” and enhance “our interoperability via the participation of our forces in multinational exercises.”

According to Fairfax Media, “more frequent dialogue on Pacific issues was likely at least partially in response to recent reports China was hoping to set up a military base in Vanuatu.” Beijing and Vanuatu’s government have denied any such plans, yet Australian media reports have been used to hypocritically denounce China’s “militarisation” of the region.

In a speech in March, NZ Foreign Minister Winston Peters called for Australia, New Zealand, the US and EU countries to work together against “external actors” in the Pacific—a reference to China—and reassert their dominance.

France maintains a military presence in its Pacific colonies of New Caledonia and French Polynesia. New Zealand has strong military ties with its former colony Samoa, Tonga and other island nations. The 1999-2008 Labour government sent troops to Solomon Islands and East Timor as part of Australia-led interventions.

Canberra, Wellington and Paris are also concerned about the rising class struggle in the Pacific, including strikes and protests against austerity in the past 12 months in Papua New Guinea, Fiji and French Polynesia. Since 2013, French soldiers have taken part in large-scale biennial military exercises in New Zealand, called Operation Southern Katipo, explicitly designed to prepare for interventions to restore “order” in Pacific nations.

Ardern’s strengthening of military ties with France is particularly striking because during the 1970s and 1980s France was viewed as a strategic rival in the Pacific. Successive New Zealand governments postured as opponents of French and US nuclear weapons testing in the region. US naval visits were effectively banned in 1986 by an anti-nuclear policy adopted by David Lange’s Labour Party government.

In 1985, French secret agents planted a bomb on Greenpeace’s anti-nuclear protest ship Rainbow Warrior in Auckland harbour—an act of state terrorism that killed one person.

Amid intensifying preparations for war, the Labour Party has abandoned any pacifist pretences and is welcoming the US and French militarisation of the Asia-Pacific region. In 2016, Labour welcomed a US navy visit to Auckland—the first in more than 30 years.

Ardern’s discussions in Europe further expose the lie that her Labour-Greens-NZ First coalition government is a progressive alternative to the National Party. These are all imperialist parties that support US and European military operations in the Middle East as well as the build-up to war against nuclear-armed Russia and China.



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