

New Zealand government promises stronger US ties after Biden elected

Tom Peters**11 November 2020**

On Sunday, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern joined her Australian counterpart and other members of the US-led Five Eyes intelligence-sharing alliance in congratulating Democrat Joe Biden and his running mate Kamala Harris on winning the US presidential election.

An unprecedented political crisis continues to unfold in the US, where sitting president Donald Trump is making baseless claims that he lost because of “fraud.” His legal team, backed by leading figures in the Republican Party, is pursuing court actions aimed at disqualifying votes for Biden in states where he won a narrow majority.

Ardern stated: “The relationship between our two countries is strong, and I look forward to developing even closer relations with the incoming Biden administration.” New Zealand would work with the US on issues “including the prosperity, security, and sustainability in the Indo-Pacific and Pacific Island regions.”

Significantly, Ardern also said New Zealand “enjoyed positive and cooperative relations with the United States over the period of the Trump administration, especially in the Indo-Pacific and Pacific Island regions.”

Ardern’s new foreign minister Nanaia Mahuta similarly told the media: “New Zealand has enjoyed a very strong relationship with America and under the Trump administration we have enjoyed the ability to strengthen those common interests that we have.”

Ardern, whose Labour Party was re-elected on October 17 with a substantial majority of seats in parliament, is still falsely portrayed in the world’s media as a progressive and compassionate leader—the antithesis to Donald Trump.

Asked by Radio NZ on Monday whether she was

concerned about Trump’s refusal to concede, Ardern replied: “No.” She downplayed the crisis in the US, stating blandly that “every democracy will have its own processes” and post-election litigation was “not unusual.”

During New Zealand’s election campaign, none of the established parties discussed the alliance with the US, which they all support. Ardern and her opponent, National Party leader Judith Collins, did not criticise Trump’s repeated threats to ignore the US election outcome and carry out a coup, and his encouragement of fascist violence. They both pledged to work with him if he remained in office.

The Trump administration, in fact, played a significant role in Ardern being able to form a government following the 2017 New Zealand election. During four weeks of negotiations after the election, the incumbent National Party, which got the most votes, tried to form a coalition government with the right-wing nationalist NZ First Party.

Trump’s appointed ambassador Scott Brown made extraordinary public statements criticising the National Party’s reluctance to fully align with US threats against North Korea. Following Brown’s intervention, NZ First—a viciously anti-immigrant and anti-Chinese party—announced it would form a coalition with the Labour Party and the Greens.

Labour had agitated against Chinese immigration and investment alongside NZ First, whereas National, while fully supporting the US alliance, had been wary of alienating China, New Zealand’s main trading partner. Washington clearly viewed the Labour-NZ First government as a more reliable partner than National to strengthen ties against China.

Ardern told Radio NZ that the relationship between the two countries would not significantly change under

a Biden administration. She mentioned Biden's 2016 visit to New Zealand, during which he held talks with the National Party government and the Labour Party, saying "those personal connections make a difference to a relationship."

During Barack Obama's presidency, vice-president Biden played a role in numerous war crimes, including the expansion of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, in which NZ troops participated, and the wars in Libya and Syria.

The Democrats' main line of attack against Trump was from the right-wing standpoint that he was "soft" on Russia and China. Both sides support the build-up to war against China, which is viewed as the greatest obstacle to US imperialist dominance over the Asia-Pacific region and the world. The coronavirus pandemic, and the economic and social crisis it has triggered, is sharply accelerating the danger of war, with both Trump and Biden seeking to scapegoat China for the virus.

Biden's 2016 visit to Australia and New Zealand was aimed at integrating the two countries into Obama's "pivot to Asia" strategy to encircle China and prepare for war. Biden reached a significant deal with the National Party government, supported by Labour and the Greens, to resume US naval visits to New Zealand for the first time since they were suspended in the 1980s.

Trump escalated the threats against China and continued to hold provocative military exercises in the South China Sea, near Taiwan and around the Korean peninsula. The Labour-NZ First government aligned itself with Washington in a 2018 defence policy statement which labelled Russia and China the main "threats" to the international order.

NZ First leader and foreign minister Winston Peters urged the US to move more of its military into the Pacific to push back against China. The Ardern government also ramped up its military and diplomatic presence in the Pacific, which the NZ ruling class considers its neo-colonial backyard.

Even during the historic economic crisis triggered by the pandemic, which has led to soaring unemployment and poverty in New Zealand, billions of dollars are being diverted to modernise and expand the military to prepare it for future US-led wars.

Some commentators have warned that a Biden

administration, far from pulling back, will likely place more pressure on US allies to align against China. David Capie, from Victoria University of Wellington's Centre for Strategic Studies, told *Stuff*: "There are going to be some aspects of the US-China relationship over the next few years that are going to force New Zealand towards some more zero-sum decision points... where you have to make a clearer choice."

Ardern's commitment to a stronger alliance with Washington, as it heads towards what would be a devastating war involving nuclear-armed powers, clearly demonstrates the right-wing and imperialist character of her government. Labour's record exposes the fraudulent claims by pseudo-left commentators such as *Jacobin*, the International Socialist Organisation, and the trade union-funded *Daily Blog*, that Labour's election win is a victory for working people.

Workers, young people and students seeking to fight against war must proceed in opposition to Labour, the Greens and their pseudo-left cheerleaders. They must fight to build an anti-war movement guided by a socialist and internationalist perspective, in opposition to the profit system which is the source of war, and all the parties which defend this system.



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