

New Zealand joins diplomatic offensive against Russia amid escalating war build-up

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Amid the intensifying US-NATO build-up to a potentially catastrophic war with Russia, New Zealand's Labour-Green Party government has positioned itself firmly on the side of the country's imperialist allies.

Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta said in a January 26 statement the government strongly supported Ukraine's "sovereignty and territorial integrity." Mahuta declared: "We call on Russia to act in a manner consistent with international law and to take immediate steps to reduce tensions and the risk of a severe miscalculation."

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern told a media conference that the government was "deeply concerned" and recognised the need to "further reinforce the sovereignty of Ukraine."

Mahuta said New Zealand "is in contact with our international partners on the situation, and strongly supports international efforts to resolve the crisis diplomatically."

Operating from the same playbook as the US Biden administration and NATO, however, Mahuta made it clear that the government identifies Russia as the aggressor, decrying "the continuing and unprecedented build-up of Russian military forces on its border with Ukraine."

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade earlier warned that New Zealand citizens in Ukraine should consider leaving, as the situation was "highly volatile" with "security conditions" ready to change at short notice.

The Russian Embassy in Wellington insisted that Russia was following international law and had no plans to invade Ukraine. "Russian troops are carrying out manoeuvres strictly in the national territory in full compliance with international rules, and, as was

repeatedly confirmed, have no intention to invade anyone," the embassy said.

NATO, with the US and UK taking the lead, is ramping up war preparations, delivering Javelin missiles and other weaponry to the Ukrainian army while stationing thousands of troops on Russia's borders. The war drive did not start in the Kremlin but, as the WSWS has pointed out, "by an utterly toxic mixture of deranged geopolitical ambitions and insoluble internal crisis" of the imperialist powers, accelerated by the COVID pandemic.

New Zealand is under growing pressure from its partners in the Five Eyes intelligence sharing network, including the US and Australia, to take a more adversarial position toward both Moscow and Beijing. A Ministry of Defence "strategic assessment" released in December devoted a section to Russia, alleging it was "undermining the international rules-based system and frustrating collective actions on a range of important issues." Such "rules" are those set and enforced by Washington, designed to maintain its own global hegemony.

With the current crisis escalating, New Zealand's foreign policy establishment has fallen into line. Victoria University Professor of Strategic Studies, Robert Ayson, told Radio NZ: "New Zealand does have an interest in having a strong United States committed to supporting other democracies—New Zealand wants the EU to work, you want NATO to work. You want Europe to be confident. Do we want a world where the strong bully the weak?"

In this upside-down world, Ayson presented Ukraine, with a government installed in a US-engineered regime-change operation in 2014, and infested with fascists, as a beacon of "democracy." Russia meanwhile, surrounded by hostile troops with advanced offensive

weaponry, was accused of challenging the “rules” of the UN Charter that “states may not use force except for in self-defence.”

Ayson said Russia’s increased troop presence was one of the largest build-ups in Europe since World War II, “evoking tragic memories of what happened 70 years ago.” Russian President Putin, Ayson charged, wants a “greater Russia with Imperial kind of aspirations. A Russia that is the dominant European power.” Yet it was the Soviet Union that was invaded by German imperialism in 1941, as the Nazis sought to redraw the map of Europe.

While New Zealand may not be in a position to send troops, Ayson observed, “I think this is one of our ‘us too’ moments, you’re showing a concrete sense of unity with our partners.” This could include placing travel restrictions on “Putin’s mates” and helping with “humanitarian distress in Ukraine in the event of an invasion.”

An op-ed in *Stuff* on January 28 asked: “Russia may invade Ukraine. What’s at stake for New Zealand?” Reporter Thomas Manch trotted out the lies perpetrated by the international media, declaring that Putin was ready to “pull the trigger.” He falsely claimed that Washington had no malign intent, declaring: “US President Joe Biden has ruled out deploying US troops to Ukraine in response to an invasion.”

An embedded video of US NATO ambassador Julianne Smith in the same article showed her warning that an invasion would have “dire, serious or massive consequences,” principally economic, for Putin. In fact, the White House is already applying pressure on its allies and “partners” to impose significant sanctions on Russia as a prelude to armed conflict.

Playing a critical role in the propaganda campaign are the pro-imperialist sections of New Zealand’s pseudo-left. The International Socialist Organisation (ISO) has posted articles on its Facebook page depicting Ukraine as an innocent party caught “in the crosshairs” between US imperialism on the one hand and aggressive “Russian imperialism,” ready to invade, on the other.

The ISO shared material from *International Viewpoint*, a publication which, as the WSWS noted, has a long record of lining up behind “humanitarian” imperialist interventions. It is currently calling for Western troops to enter Ukraine, under the guise of a “UN peacekeeping contingent in the Donbas.”

The WSWS pointed out that the false designation of Russia and China as “imperialist” serves to diminish the “central and decisive global counterrevolutionary role of American, European and Japanese imperialism,” thereby facilitating the pseudo-left’s active collaboration with the United States in regime-change operations, such as in Syria.

Indeed, in October 2016 New Zealand’s pseudo-left groups—Socialist Aotearoa, Fightback and the ISO—held protests denouncing Russian intervention in Syria, and blaming Moscow, not the US, for the mass destruction and carnage in that country. The Wellington protest was held outside the Russian embassy, echoing a call by then British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson for demonstrations at the Russian embassy in London, calculated to whip up support for Washington’s agenda.

Also coming forward to demonise Russia is the pro-government *Daily Blog*, a collection of liberal, trade union and pseudo-left commentators. In his outlook for 2022 at the beginning of January, the blog’s editor Martyn Bradbury predicted that Putin might invade Ukraine “after the Winter Olympics so that Xi can crack down on Hong Kong at the same time.”

In a January 23 post, Bradbury intoned that New Zealand “should not get dragged into this madness.” The conception that the country can remain outside escalating global conflicts is absurd. As a minor imperialist power, New Zealand has participated in wars for over a century, attaching itself to Britain and the US, in return for their support for NZ’s colonial dominance over parts of the South Pacific. Today, what is emerging is not a localised conflict but a devastating war involving the US, Europe, Russia and China—all of them nuclear armed.



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