

New Zealand government aligns with US against Russia

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25 February 2022

New Zealand's Labour-Party led government has aligned itself with the United States and NATO, as they move relentlessly closer to a devastating war with Russia.

Yesterday, Russian forces carried out a military intervention into Ukraine, including missile strikes and attacks on the country's air force. Dozens of military and civilian deaths have been reported. The incursion was launched after President Vladimir Putin declared two breakaway Ukrainian states, Donetsk and Luhansk, independent and ordered troops to cross into the territories.

For months, the US and its allies relentlessly sought to escalate tensions and provoke a Russian attack. Since the US-backed coup in 2014, which toppled a Russia-aligned government in Ukraine, the western imperialist powers have provided billions of dollars in weapons and training to Ukraine's military and fascist paramilitary forces. The US has deployed thousands of troops into Eastern Europe, and President Biden has just announced that 7,000 reinforcements are being sent to Germany.

Jacinda Ardern's government in New Zealand is supporting the US build-up. On Tuesday, New Zealand Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta, currently visiting Europe, denounced the recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk as a violation of international law designed to "create a pretext for invasion." On Wednesday, she said the Russian ambassador in Wellington was "called in" to hear New Zealand's "strong opposition to the actions taken by Russia in recent days, and condemn what looks to be the beginning of a Russian invasion into Ukraine territory."

Last night, Ardern and Mahuta released a statement denouncing what they called an "unprovoked and unnecessary attack by Russia." They announced a travel ban on Russian government officials and the prohibition of exports to Russia's military and security forces. Bilateral foreign ministry engagement has also been

suspended.

This morning, acting Foreign Minister David Parker told Radio NZ that these measures would have a "limited" impact on Russia. New Zealand exports \$293 million worth of goods to Russia, mostly dairy products.

By law, New Zealand cannot impose economic sanctions outside the United Nations. The main opposition National Party's foreign affairs spokesman Gerry Brownlee said travel bans were "nonsense" and the law had to change so that NZ could take more "aggressive action."

Before her departure, Mahuta had already indicated that "Russia's aggression towards Ukraine," would be the subject of her discussions in Europe. Her 11-day trip is primarily focussed on a European Union ministerial forum dealing with "co-operation" in the Indo-Pacific. This is code for the escalating US-led confrontation in the Indo-Pacific with China, which has been joined by NATO powers including the UK, France and Germany.

Mahuta will travel to London to meet UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss, who has spearheaded the Tory government's warmongering against Moscow. Mahuta's final stop will be Geneva where she will give a speech to the UN Human Rights Council, the first from a New Zealand foreign minister since the council was established in 2006.

As the WSWS explained, the US-led war preparations against Russia have been long in the making. The aim of Washington and its imperialist allies is to dismember Russia, as a necessary step in preparation for war against China, and to establish neo-colonial control over the entire Eurasian landmass.

The entire ruling elite in New Zealand supports the Labour Party-Greens coalition government's alignment with the intensifying war drive. At a parliamentary select committee hearing last week, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) secretary Chris Seed told MPs that

Russia posed “one of the most significant security challenges and risks to international peace and security, since the end of the Cold War.” He added that war in Europe would be of “no benefit to New Zealand.”

In fact, 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.

A Defence Ministry strategic assessment released in December demanded a more aggressive military stance against China and Russia, which it accused of “undermining the international rules-based system”—i.e. the post-World War II rules established by Washington to enforce its global hegemony. It asserted New Zealand’s “freedom to act” anywhere in the Pacific where Chinese influence could be deemed a threat to its interests.

New Zealand’s ambassador to Warsaw visited Ukraine on January 24 and met with Ukrainian officials, and last week Mahuta spoke with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba. According to MFAT, Mahuta acknowledged the “warm relationship” between the two countries, “underpinned by our shared values, including our commitment to multilateralism, human rights, and the rules-based international order.” In fact, the government in Kiev stems from a US-engineered coup in 2014, and is infested with fascists.

Ukraine’s Ambassador to New Zealand, Kateryna Zelenko, told *Stuff* that New Zealand’s condemnation of “Russia’s aggression” was “useful” in showing that Ukraine had support in every corner of the world.

Mahuta also received a telephone call from US Secretary of State Antony Blinken during his recent trip to Fiji. According to the US State Department, the pair discussed both the “collective challenges of the Indo-Pacific” and “their shared commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

A view is emerging in New Zealand’s foreign policy establishment that the country faces a diplomatic and military escalation on “two fronts”—in both Europe and the Indo-Pacific. Commenting on Blinken’s Pacific trip, Geoffrey Miller from Victoria University of Wellington wrote that “from the US perspective, Ukraine, Russia and China are increasingly being interpreted as part of the same geopolitical jigsaw puzzle.” While Miller claimed that the “two-front” theory “oversimplifies matters,” he conceded that it points to “a potential World War Three.”

The Paris meeting of the Ministerial Forum for Co-operation in the Indo-Pacific, which Mahuta is attending, is being co-hosted by the European Union and France.

Nina Obermaier, the EU’s ambassador to New Zealand, told *Newsroom* the forum will deepen the EU’s relationship with “like-minded” countries in the Indo-Pacific.

The EU’s Indo-Pacific strategy, released last September, sets out plans for increased European positioning on the opposite side of the globe. The document notes the significant military build-up, “including by China,” with the region’s share of global military spending increasing from 20 percent in 2009 to 28 percent in 2019.

Amid deepening tensions, UK and EU navies, including from France and Germany, have repeatedly conducted provocative military exercises in the South China Sea and near Taiwan. Last October, the New Zealand naval frigate *Te Kaha* and an Air Force *Orion* joined the *Bersama Gold 21* war games, alongside the UK Carrier Strike Group and allied forces in the South China Sea.

A sustained barrage is underway from the New Zealand government, media and academics against both China and Russia, while the population is kept in the dark about the devastating consequences of war. Not one critical question has been asked by the corporate media about the facts and historical background surrounding the sharpening geo-political crisis.

In a typical comment, Otago University professor Robert Patman told a webinar hosted by the *K?k?* that Putin was acting “at complete variance with international law.” Without condemning the aggressive actions of the US and NATO, he asked: “Are we going to tolerate such ‘wild west, might is right’ behaviour in the 21st century?” This Sunday, at 10.00 a.m. New Zealand time, the WSWs is hosting an international online webinar, “Fight COVID! Save Lives! Stop the drive to World War III!” to elaborate a political program to mobilise the working class against war and the COVID-19 pandemic. We urge our readers to register and attend this critical event.



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