

New Zealand escalates involvement in NATO war against Russia over Ukraine

Tom Peters
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On April 11, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced a “significant contribution” to the Ukrainian military. An air force C-130 Hercules with 50 Defence Force personnel has been deployed to Europe, along with eight more “logistics personnel” in Germany. Nine intelligence personnel are already in Europe as part of the war effort. These forces are being integrated into NATO’s war machine, which is flooding Ukraine with high-powered weapons, aimed at inflicting a decisive military defeat on Russia.

For the first time, New Zealand’s Labour Party-led government is also providing funding for “lethal aid.” According to a government statement, \$7.5m will be used to “contribute to weapons and ammunition procurement by the United Kingdom.” A further \$4.1 million will “support commercial satellite access for the Ukrainian Defence Intelligence.”

These amounts are in addition to \$11 million that New Zealand has already contributed to “non-lethal” aid. NZ has also joined sweeping international sanctions aimed at crippling the Russian economy.

Air Marshal Kevin Short, NZ’s Chief of Defence Force, said the new deployment was the largest to Europe since about 250 personnel were sent to Bosnia from 1992–1996, following the bloody war that broke up Yugoslavia.

In a press conference, Ardern said New Zealand troops would not enter Ukraine, but would provide “logistical support and people power” to help distribute the “enormous quantities of military support that countries are contributing” to Ukraine’s military. She framed the intervention as defensive, saying it was part of a “global effort to support Ukraine against Russia’s invasion... [a] violent breach of international law.”

In reality, the European and US imperialist powers deliberately provoked the Russian invasion. They

supported the coup in Kiev in 2014 that overthrew the elected, pro-Russian government and triggered a civil war. Since then, the same powers have flooded Ukraine with weapons, many of which have gone into the hands of neo-fascist militias that are playing a major role in the fighting against Russian forces.

The US-NATO powers are now using the war as a pretext for escalating their military build-up against both Russia and China. The US ruling elite is seeking to reverse its long-term economic crisis, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, through military means. It views Russia and China as the major obstacles to US hegemony over Eurasia and the world.

The European powers, and other imperialist allies such as Australia and New Zealand, are supporting the US war effort to secure their seats at the table for the new redivision of the world. In the Pacific region, NZ and Australia are seeking US support to push back against China, which is seen as a threat to their neo-colonial dominance.

Without any democratic process, or even the fig-leaf of a debate in parliament, the Ardern government has taken New Zealand into a war, which threatens to escalate into a direct conflict between nuclear-armed powers.

In an interview with *Newshub* on April 12, NZ Defence Force Commander of Joint Forces Rear Admiral James Gilmour was asked: “Is New Zealand technically at war?” He replied that this was for the government to say, but then basically confirmed that it is the case, saying: “I think it’s reasonably clear that our status as a neutral country has shifted.”

Ardern emphasised that the war was continually changing, and that NZ’s deployment could be boosted again: “We will continue to answer the calls of Ukraine, with regular reviews of how we can keep

making the greatest difference from here in Aotearoa New Zealand.” On April 13, Defence Minister Peeni Henare told *Newshub* that New Zealand would be “ready to respond” if called upon to play a more active role, and he did not rule out entering Ukraine.

Having participated in the criminal US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq over the last two decades, New Zealand is now fully integrated into US-led preparations for “great power” conflict. In 2016, the then-National Party government announced \$20 billion worth of military spending over the next 15 years, to improve New Zealand’s “interoperability” with the US and other allies. In 2018, the Labour Party-Greens-NZ First coalition government issued a major defence strategy document that copied the Pentagon in identifying Russia and China as the major threats to the global order.

The political establishment and corporate media, joined by pseudo-left groups like the ISO, are involved in a full-blown propaganda campaign in support of the war. As in the US and other countries, the demonisation of Russia serves to divert attention from soaring social inequality at home, and the Ardern government’s decision to allow COVID-19 to spread. The virus is killing more than 10 people per day in NZ, but this has been significantly downgraded as a news story, in favour of blanket coverage of Ukraine.

On April 12, the opposition National Party defence spokesman Gerry Brownlee expressed bipartisan support for the latest deployment of troops, telling *Newshub* it was “a good step.” He added that the government should send Javelin missiles to Ukraine and expel the Russian ambassador Georgii Zuev, who he accused of spreading “misinformation about the Russian aggression in Ukraine.”

Newshub’s interviewer Ryan Bridge blamed “Mark Zuckerberg and Facebook” for allowing the Russian Embassy in Wellington to post material about the war in Ukraine—essentially demanding that its posts be censored.

Another National Party MP, Simon O’Connor, has proposed that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky be invited to address New Zealand’s parliament. Zelensky’s speeches to parliaments in Australia, the UK, Germany, the US and Japan, among other countries, have been used to glorify the right-wing, pro-NATO Ukrainian government and justify further

military support.

Green Party defence spokesperson Golriz Ghahraman told Radio NZ the government should fund “humanitarian relief” instead of weapons. She made clear that this didn’t signal any opposition to the NATO war effort. Rather, such aid was “where New Zealand is best-placed to get engaged in this war,” whereas providing weapons was “contributing to something that we understand less of.”

On Twitter, Ghahraman joined the National Party in calling for the Russian ambassador to be “expelled” because he refused to appear before a parliamentary committee to face questions about the war in Ukraine. She declared that “his continued presence in NZ will only validate a war criminal’s regime.”

The Green Party is an integral part of the Labour-led coalition government, with four ministerial positions. It fully supports the decision to take New Zealand into the war in Ukraine, and is playing its role in stoking anti-Russia hysteria. Its suggestion that New Zealand provide “humanitarian” rather direct military aid in no way changes its backing for the predatory US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine that can rapidly escalate into a direct clash between nuclear-armed powers.



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