

In White House visit, New Zealand PM joins escalating US offensive in the Pacific

John Braddock
5 June 2022

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern met with President Joe Biden at the White House on May 31, during a two-week trip to the United States.

The leaders spoke for more than an hour, with Biden fulsomely praising Ardern. “Your leadership has taken on a critical role in this global stage,” Biden said, “galvanising action on climate change, the global effort to curb violence, extremism, and online, like happened in Christchurch.” In a speech at Harvard University, Ardern had called for greater censorship of social media and gun controls.

While given scant attention, TVNZ reported that Ardern also met with two of the administration’s leading war hawks, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Council Indo-Pacific Coordinator Kurt Campbell. Both have been at the forefront of the escalating attacks on China in order to prevent any challenge to US global dominance.

The Oval Office meeting followed a US-led diplomatic offensive in Asia, including a meeting of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)—the de facto military alliance of the US, Japan, India and Australia—and Biden’s visits to South Korea and Japan, aimed against China. Visiting Tokyo in April, Ardern also signed a significant intelligence sharing pact with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

The Biden-Ardern meeting coincided with a tour of the Pacific by China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi, which saw multiple bilateral deals signed with almost a dozen Pacific nations. The Solomon Islands finalised a security agreement with Beijing, which had prompted threats by Washington and Canberra raising the spectre of a possible “regime change” operation against the government of Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare.

The White House meeting’s final communiqué—unusually long at 3,000 words—had the character of a militarist manifesto, beginning with a

glorification of the bloody history of the Pacific during World War II. “80 years ago,” the document intoned, “U.S. Marines arrived in New Zealand before embarking for the Pacific theatre. Together we honor that history of shared resolve in the face of aggression.” The war in the Pacific was a bitter inter-imperialist conflict, fought over a vast geo-strategic territory which has been controlled since by the US.

The document then refers prominently to the US-NATO proxy war in Ukraine, claiming that “Russia continues to wage its unjustified and unprovoked war in Ukraine.” This is the first of many blatant lies and fabrications. The US has spent decades fomenting wars around the globe while ratcheting up pressure on the Kremlin with NATO’s encroaching borders.

New Zealand’s Labour-led government wholeheartedly supports the war, applying sanctions on Russia and sending material and military personnel to Europe. The working class in New Zealand, which never had any say in the matter, is now being dragged into a war involving nuclear-armed powers. The communiqué makes clear that the two countries are acting in lockstep, including projected action “ensuring that global supply chains for food and agricultural products remain free and open,” which would require a direct confrontation with Russia.

Turning to China, the document lists the alleged transgressions used by the White House to advance its own preparations for war: the South China Sea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and so-called “human-rights violations” in Xinjiang. The statement reaffirms both countries’ commitment to “preserving the international rules-based order”—whereby the US sets the “rules” to maintain its own global hegemony.

Increased Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific is deemed to require “new resolve and closer co-operation” between New Zealand and the US. It asserts the US military’s right of “freedom of navigation and overflight,

in the South China Sea and beyond,” and opposes Beijing’s purported “unlawful maritime claims and activities” in the South China Sea.

The Solomon Islands-China security pact is condemned. The establishment of a “persistent military presence” in the Pacific would, the joint statement baldly claims without any evidence, present “national-security concerns to both our countries.” The US, New Zealand and Australia all assert the right to establish their own military presence across the Pacific, which they regard as their own “backyard.”

With security and defence now “an ever-more-important focus” of the US strategic partnership, New Zealand is being called on to play a stepped-up role, along with Australia, as Washington’s deputy sheriff in its militarisation of the region, raising the prospect of a formal military alliance. Relations with Washington were disrupted by New Zealand’s 1987 anti-nuclear legislation, and despite a subsequent thaw, the status of full US “ally” has not been re-established.

Pointing to Labour’s multi-billion dollar defence spend, the statement predicts that New Zealand’s new capabilities will provide “opportunities for combined operations and to expand our cooperation in other ways.” “As the security environment in the Indo-Pacific evolves, so must our defense cooperation,” it says, including interoperability of the armed forces, personnel exchanges, co-deployments, and “defense trade.”

Questioned by reporters whether Biden had pushed for even more commitments, Ardern replied that they were “not needed.” The political establishment’s posturing around New Zealand’s “independent” foreign policy is increasingly threadbare. Green Party foreign spokesperson Golriz Ghahraman expressed surprise at the “unexpected degree of proximity” outlined in the joint statement. “Where are our bottom lines here?” she nervously asked—entirely hypocritically given the Greens are a partner in the Labour-led government.

New Zealand is aligning itself with the entire “regional architecture” aimed at shoring-up the hegemony of American imperialism—and Australia and New Zealand’s own neo-colonial interests in the Pacific. This includes a “strong commitment” to so-called “like minded countries” within ASEAN, the Quad and AUKUS (the militarist pact between Australia, UK and the US). Trampling on longstanding anti-nuclear sentiment across the Pacific, Australia’s incoming Labor government is proceeding at pace with the creation of a nuclear-powered submarine fleet.

Beijing responded to the US-NZ communiqué with a blistering denunciation, saying it “distorts and smears China’s normal cooperation with Pacific Island countries, deliberately hypes up the South China Sea issue, makes irresponsible remarks on and grossly interferes in China’s internal affairs.”

In Wellington, Chinese ambassador Wang Xiaolang said in a speech to the NZ China Council that New Zealand had “valuable” trade ties with China that had “been slowly built up with hard work over the years from both sides” and should not “be taken for granted.”

China foreign affairs spokesperson Zhao Lijian urged the US to “abandon its Cold War mentality” and expressed hope that New Zealand would “adhere to its independent foreign policy and do more to enhance security and mutual trust among regional countries and safeguard regional peace and stability.”

The Chinese government’s rebuke clearly made some in the political establishment nervous about relations with China, the country’s most important trading partner. Former prime minister and chairman of the ANZ Bank John Key told *Newshub* it is a “waste of time” trying to get China out of the Pacific, and New Zealand should be “working with them instead.” Key’s ex-foreign minister Gerry Brownlee also emphasised that the “starting point” on the Pacific is that the New Zealand economy depends on trade with China.

Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta is currently resisting intense media pressure to follow her Australian counterpart, Penny Wong, around the Pacific to shore up support following Wang Yi’s tour. Mahuta told TVNZ that New Zealand is “not defined by China,” and does not need to react in a way that “makes us look desperate.”

Mahuta has declared that the issues relating to “regional security (and) regional sovereignty” will now be taken up at the Pacific Islands Forum leaders meeting, due in Fiji within weeks. Australia and New Zealand will doubtless demand, and if necessary threaten, that the 18-member body takes a unified stand against any further Chinese incursions into the region.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)