

New Zealand PM affirms anti-China stance on visit to Australia

Tom Peters**13 June 2022**

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern visited Australia last week to meet with recently-elected Australian Labor Party Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

Her trip followed soon after Ardern's visit to Washington, where she issued a joint statement with President Joe Biden confirming New Zealand's alignment with the US military build-up in the Indo-Pacific region.

Ardern also visited Japan in April, where she signed an agreement strengthening security ties and bringing Japan closer to the US-led intelligence network, the Five Eyes, of which New Zealand is a member.

The trip to Australia served the same purpose of lining up with US imperialism, both in the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, and its military provocations and threats against China. In order to resolve its historic economic crisis, the US ruling class is seeking the complete subjugation of Russia and China to its interests, raising the risk of war between nuclear-armed powers.

Following last month's Australian election, which featured anti-China demagogic from the media and political establishment, the Labor government quickly signalled that it will act as Washington's attack dog in the Pacific. Albanese's first act was to fly to Japan for a meeting of the "Quad"—a quasi-military alliance aimed against China, involving the governments of the US, Australia, India and Japan.

In a joint press conference with Ardern on June 10, Albanese was asked whether he wanted "to see New Zealand do more" to counter "the rise of China in the Pacific." He replied that Australia and New Zealand were "in lockstep on the Pacific" and would continue to work together closely. He referred to Canberra's plans for the region, including "over half a billion

dollars of foreign aid" and "planning to train for defence."

While New Zealand is not a member of the Quad, or the AUKUS (Australia-UK-US) military pact, Ardern told the media "we see those [arrangements] as welcome." AUKUS covers a wide range of weaponry and intelligence collaboration, including Australia's acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines and hypersonic missiles.

Ardern told reporters that the submarines were "not a point of tension at all" between the two countries, despite New Zealand's official policy barring nuclear-powered vessels from entering its waters.

On the same day, in an interview with Channel Nine's "Today Show," Ardern said she was concerned about China's "potential militarisation of our region." She said Pacific island nations were "sovereign" and had the right to develop relations with China, but New Zealand was asking governments to "come together and talk about [security issues] as a region."

In fact, Australia and New Zealand treat the Pacific as their colonial "backyard," using regional bodies such as the Pacific Islands Forum to exert pressure on small and impoverished countries. The imperialist powers have a long history of military interventions and regime-change operations. New Zealand joined Australia in challenging Solomon Islands' recent security agreement with Beijing, while the US and Australia have threatened the Sogavare government over the issue.

New Zealand and Australia are formal military allies, and both have sent troops to join the US-led wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. In addition to the military preparations against China in the Pacific, Ardern and Albanese reportedly discussed their role in the war against Russia, which has included sending

weapons to the Ukrainian military.

The growing US-led confrontation with China is fuelling nervousness in the New Zealand ruling class. New Zealand's agriculture-based economy is more reliant than ever on trade with China, which takes nearly 33 percent of New Zealand's total exports—up from 25 percent in 2018. Following Ardern's meeting with Biden, Beijing issued a blunt warning that New Zealand's support for the US could impact trade.

China's foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said on June 1, "the joint statement by the US and New Zealand is out of ulterior motives to create disinformation and attack and discredit China." He noted: "The US has military bases all over the world, yet it expresses concerns about normal security cooperation with other countries."

NewstalkZB political editor Jason Walls warned on June 2 that New Zealand "can be critical of China, but only to a point... If the Chinese government is upset enough, they could slap some tariffs on our products. And that could devastate a small country like New Zealand."

On June 7, just days before her meeting with Albanese, Ardern sought to paper over the growing tensions telling TVNZ that New Zealand's position has "never been about picking sides" between China and the US. "The Pacific has had a relationship with China for years, so it's not new," she said.

As the US and its allies lurch closer to war against China, however, Ardern's Labour-Greens government faces growing pressure from sections of the political and media establishment to drop any pretence of neutrality.

The anti-Chinese NZ First Party leader Winston Peters—who served as deputy prime minister in the 2017–2020 Labour Party-led coalition government—has joined the opposition National and ACT parties in attacking Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta for being slow to respond to China's recent diplomatic agreements with several Pacific countries.

In a speech on May 23 at Otago University, Peters declared that there were "serious security concerns emerging in the Pacific," and urged closer collaboration with the US, Australia, France, Japan and the UK against China.

On May 30, prominent pro-US academic Anne-Marie Brady told *Newshub* that China was "pursuing a

military agenda in the Pacific" in order to be able to "blockade and cut off Australia, New Zealand, France and the United States." She ludicrously compared China's actions with those of "imperial Japan."

Brady complained: "Unfortunately, our government does move slowly, and same with the Australians—and our defence forces are simply not equipped... what we need to do now is defend our own massive maritime territory."

This nationalist and militarist hysteria is echoed by the pro-Labour Party *Daily Blog*. On June 2, its editor Martyn Bradbury declared that China could "strangle off exports" and shoot down satellites launched from New Zealand. In a bid to whip up toxic bigotry, he depicted the Chinese migrant population as a threat, saying Beijing could call "mass demonstrations" in NZ and "cause enormous upheaval that could easily spill into something ugly."

The website—which publishes a number of trade union and self-styled "left" bloggers—is demanding that military spending be at least doubled from 1.5 percent to 3 percent of gross domestic product. It has also called for the Socialist Equality Group to be investigated by the security agencies for "possible treason" because it opposes the preparations for imperialist war, and has exposed the blog's war propaganda on the *World Socialist Web Site*.



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