

# New Zealand PM attempts to cover up alignment with US against China

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In a speech at the Lowy Institute in Australia on July 7, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern sought to cover-up New Zealand's alignment with US imperialism and its support for the US-led military build-up in the Indo-Pacific region, in preparation for war against China.

The speech followed Ardern's appearance at the NATO summit in Spain, where she gave full-throated support for the US-NATO war against Russia over Ukraine, declaring, falsely, that Russia bore sole responsibility for the conflict. She trumpeted the fact that New Zealand has sent troops to Europe to help train and supply the Ukrainian military. Ardern then compared Russia's actions to Beijing's, saying: "China has in recent times also become more assertive and more willing to challenge international rules and norms."

NATO members adopted a strategic document which highlighted the need to prepare "for high-intensity, multi-domain warfighting against nuclear-armed peer-competitors." It identified Russia and China as "threats" to the alliance's "values and interests." US imperialism and its allies are seeking to resolve their worsening economic crisis by achieving complete domination over Russia and China, even if this comes at the cost of nuclear war and millions of deaths.

In line with this program, New Zealand has already sent troops to Europe, to bolster the war against Russia. There are roughly 90 NZ soldiers involved in the transportation of military equipment to Ukraine and in the training of Ukrainian forces in Britain.

China's embassy in Wellington objected to Ardern's "misguided accusations" at the NATO gathering, and implied that the real source of instability and militarisation in the Pacific was the US. The embassy's statement warned that New Zealand's alignment with

Washington could have consequences for relations with China, which purchases 30 percent of NZ's exports. Any disruption to trade with China could have a devastating effect on the New Zealand economy, which is already experiencing soaring inflation and may be heading into a recession.

Clearly anxious to avoid such a rupture, at least for now, Ardern used her speech to the Sydney-based think tank to pull back and rhetorically distance New Zealand's foreign policy from that of the US and Australia.

She stated that the war in Ukraine should not be seen as "a demonstration of the inevitable trajectory in other areas of geostrategic contest." This was an apparent reference to the unfounded claims by Canberra and Washington that China is preparing to invade Taiwan, which have been made in order to justify increased military collaboration and provocative naval exercises around the island.

In the Indo-Pacific region, Ardern said, "diplomacy must become the strongest tool and de-escalation the loudest call. We won't succeed, however, if those parties we seek to engage with are increasingly isolated and the region we inhabit becomes increasingly divided and polarised."

She praised New Zealand's "trade relationship" with China and said "even as China becomes more assertive in the pursuit of its interests, there are still shared interests on which we can and should cooperate. The post-war order and the rules that underpin it have supported China's rise, and as a permanent member of the Security Council, China has a crucial role to play in upholding that order."

Later, Ardern was asked by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Sarah Ferguson: "Do you see your government as being in a strategic partnership

with Australia to counter China's growing influence in the region?" Ardern avoided answering directly, but declared that nothing had changed in New Zealand's relationship with Australia.

Similarly, when asked "how threatening would it be" to NZ and Australia if China were to establish a military presence in the Solomon Islands, Ardern replied: "We're opposed to the militarisation of the region but... we can take that position in a country-neutral way. It doesn't matter who."

Such statements are blatantly dishonest and hypocritical. New Zealand, an imperialist power in the Pacific, has conducted numerous military deployments in the region, including Australian-led interventions in the Solomons and East Timor.

In her Lowy Institute speech, Ardern declared that "we see local security challenges being resolved locally, with Pacific Islands Forum members' security being addressed first and foremost by the Forum family." The PIF has been used by Australia and New Zealand for decades to pressure small and impoverished nations in the region, under the guise of "multilateralism."

The *Global Times*, part of China's state-run media, welcomed Ardern's speech at the Lowy Institute in an article that stated: "With a comparatively independent China stance, New Zealand was seen [by analysts as being] less aggressive toward China in the Five Eyes alliance and has not been blatantly following the US's geopolitical strategies of containing China."

At the same time, the article noted that Beijing was "angered" by a joint statement issued last month by Ardern and US president Joe Biden, which condemned China's security arrangement with the government of the Solomon Islands.

The reality is that although Ardern is seeking to smooth over the current tensions with China, her government has significantly strengthened the alliance with the US over the past five years.

A New Zealand defence policy statement in 2018 for the first time identified China and Russia as "threats" to the international order. This position was echoed in a 2021 Defence Assessment document, which also expressed support for the AUKUS military pact (between Australia, the US and UK) and the Quad (the quasi-alliance of Australia, the US, India and Japan). New Zealand has also continued its involvement in US

and Australian military exercises in the region in order to enhance interoperability with its allies in preparation for war.

While Ardern delivers speeches calling for "disarmament" and "diplomacy," her Labour Party-Greens coalition government has significantly increased military spending and recruitment into the armed forces. On the same day that Ardern delivered her speech in Sydney, her Defence Minister Peeni Henare launched another policy review, aimed at ensuring that the Defence Force is "fit for purpose" amid "the intensification of strategic competition, and a world which is seeing a brutal invasion of Ukraine by Russia."

Henare boasted that the government had already overseen "historic investments" worth "\$4.5 billion in 12 major defence capability projects," including new aircraft and armoured vehicles.

As the danger of a devastating world war becomes more imminent, the Ardern government will not be able to maintain its pretence of neutrality regarding China. As was the case in World Wars I and II, the New Zealand ruling class has aligned itself with the most powerful imperialist bloc, led by the US, in order to safeguard its own colonial interests in the South Pacific.

The only force that can prevent the mad descent into war is the international working class, which must build an anti-war movement in opposition to every capitalist government, including Labour in New Zealand, on the basis of socialism and internationalism.



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