

New Zealand sends another 120 troops to train Ukrainian soldiers

Tom Peters
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On August 15, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced that another 120 New Zealand soldiers will be sent to the UK to assist with training Ukrainian armed forces for the US-NATO proxy war against Russia. The troops, she said, “will be focused on infantry training, in particular front-line combat, including weapons handling, combat first aid, operational law and soldiers’ skills.”

They will join soldiers from Britain, Canada, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Latvia, Germany and the Netherlands, which are all providing trainers. In the last six weeks, more than 2,300 Ukrainian civilian recruits have passed through the program, and Britain has pledged to train 10,000 by October.

Already, in May, New Zealand sent 30 Defence Force personnel to instruct Ukrainian forces in the use of artillery. New Zealand troops have also been stationed in Germany and Belgium, involved in coordinating supplies for Ukraine, and assisting with unspecified intelligence operations.

The total number of New Zealand forces supporting Ukraine will increase to 224. This makes it NZ’s largest military deployment in decades, exceeding the numbers stationed at any one time in Iraq and Afghanistan during the criminal US-led wars in those countries.

Ardern told a press conference that New Zealand was joining the international “response to Russia’s ongoing aggression,” and that its “blatant attack on a country’s sovereignty, and the subsequent loss of innocent lives, is wrong and intolerable.”

These statements echo Washington’s false and hypocritical narrative of Russia being solely responsible for the war. In fact, Putin’s disastrous and reactionary invasion of Ukraine was deliberately provoked by the US and European powers, which supported a far-right coup in 2014 that ousted the elected government of Viktor Yanukovich. This triggered the separation of Crimea and a civil war with pro-Russia separatists in eastern Ukraine.

The US and NATO have poured billions into arming and training Ukraine’s military, including fascist militias such as the Azov Battalion and the Ukrainian Volunteer Corps. At the same time, NATO has built up its forces throughout Eastern Europe in preparation for direct war with Russia.

US imperialism and its allies aim to inflict a crushing defeat on Russia, to overthrow Putin, and establish a puppet regime. This is part of Washington’s broader strategy to reverse America’s economic decline through war against both Russia and China. The Ukrainians being trained in Britain are cannon fodder for the opening stage of this global war.

New Zealand, a minor imperialist country with a neo-colonial sphere in the south-west Pacific, has been an ally of the US since World War II, and has become completely integrated into its war plans. New Zealand’s ruling elite has no objection to illegal invasions in violation of national sovereignty to safeguard its own interests and those of its allies.

The Labour Party-led government of Helen Clark, supported by the pseudo-left Alliance Party, sent the elite SAS military unit to take part in the 2001 US-led invasion of Afghanistan. For 20 years, successive NZ governments redeployed troops to this imperialist war. The Clark government also deployed dozens of soldiers to Iraq in 2003. These wars, aimed at establishing US control over resources and strategic areas of the globe, have cost the lives of more than a million people and made millions more homeless and destitute.

Now, the Ardern government is dragging New Zealand into a far more explosive conflict involving nuclear-armed powers, which is rapidly developing into a third world war.

The latest deployment was undoubtedly discussed during US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman’s meeting with Ardern in New Zealand on August 9.

Afterwards, Sherman told Radio NZ that relations between the two countries were “incredibly valuable” and that New Zealand could eventually join the AUKUS (Australia-UK-US) security pact, which is aimed at ramping up the militarisation of Australia and the Indo-Pacific region in preparation for war with China.

Sections of the NZ political and media establishment are nervous about US military provocations against China, which is New Zealand’s most important trading partner. Former Prime Minister John Key described US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan earlier this month—escorted by navy warships including an aircraft carrier—as “reckless, provocative and dangerous.”

The Ardern government, however, has labelled both Russia and China as “threats” to the international order, and is intent on using the war in Ukraine to strengthen ties with the US and NATO. Defence Minister Peeni Henare told the media on August 15 that the latest deployment “provides an opportunity for NZDF personnel to gain valuable experience through conducting core soldier skills in a foreign environment, alongside key partners, which promotes retention in our defence workforce.”

Retention of soldiers is a key concern as the government boosts military spending. In July, Henare pointed to \$4.5 billion being invested in 12 major defence capability projects, including the purchase of “four new P-8A Poseidon aircraft, five new C-130J Super Hercules aircraft, and 43 Bushmaster vehicles.”

However, on August 10, *Stuff* reported that a survey last September found 34 percent of army personnel were dissatisfied with low wages and 27 percent were actively looking to leave—1,100 out of 4,500 soldiers. No progress has been made towards the goal, announced three years ago, of increasing the size of the army to 6,000 soldiers.

The government and corporate media—assisted by Labour’s allies, the Green Party and the pseudo-left supporters of imperialism—are seeking to overcome deeply ingrained anti-war sentiments by whipping up anti-Russia hysteria. As in the US and internationally, militarism and nationalism are being stoked to divert growing anger in the working class over the surging cost of living and social inequality, and the public health disaster caused by the Ardern government abandoning any effort to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Last week, prominent TV and radio host Tova O’Brien travelled to Ukraine to interview President Volodymyr Zelensky. The trip was supported by New Zealand’s state broadcasting fund. The fawning half-hour interview, which aired on Today FM, had nothing in common with

journalism; it was unadulterated war propaganda.

O’Brien did not ask about the causes of the war, or the role of the Ukrainian government and its imperialist backers in provoking it. The interview was devoted to glorifying Ukraine and its leader, and pressuring New Zealand to expand its support for the war.

O’Brien stated at one point: “New Zealand has given just 3 Euro [\$NZ4.86] per capita [for lethal aid]. At the other end of the spectrum, America has given 71 Euro per capita. The global average: 29 Euro. Do we risk being on the wrong side of history here?”

Zelensky replied that history would remember how much money each country gave to the war effort. He also said the amount of money given by NZ would not even pay for a single day of fighting.

O’Brien used the interview to demand the expulsion of the Russian ambassador from New Zealand, and that Ardern visit Ukraine in person.

While in Ukraine, O’Brien also interviewed a small number of New Zealanders participating directly in the conflict. Writing for *Stuff*, she described one, favourably, as a “fighter keen for the combat experience New Zealand’s military wasn’t able to give him, the adrenaline rush of being in contact with the enemy.” The article was basically a recruitment advertisement for mercenaries on behalf of the Ukrainian state.

The integration of New Zealand into the US-NATO war against Russia, despite being on the opposite side of the planet, is a further warning that this conflict threatens to engulf the entire world. A third World War—involving nuclear weapons and the destruction of hundreds of millions of lives—can only be stopped by the independent intervention of the working class, organised in a worldwide anti-war movement based on a socialist political program to put an end to capitalism, which is the root cause of war.



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