

# New Zealand national security briefing promotes war and censorship

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New Zealand's Labour Party-led government this month released a "Draft National Security Long-term Insights Briefing," prepared by the department of the prime minister and cabinet and the ministry of foreign affairs, in collaboration with the intelligence agencies.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern unveiled the 28-page draft on November 1 at a national meeting of various state and non-government agencies titled "Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism." The event was ostensibly held to discuss how to prevent terrorist attacks, such as the mass murder of 51 people at two mosques in Christchurch by right-wing extremist Brenton Tarrant on March 15, 2019. However, there was no reference to fascism or the far-right in Ardern's speech or the national security briefing.

The 28-page document identifies the main national security threat as "increasing competition between countries and the deterioration of the rules-based order." That is the US imperialist-dominated world order that New Zealand supports, as a minor imperialist power in the Pacific. It calls for measures to counter "organised crime" and "terrorism and violent extremism," as well as alleged "foreign interference" and online "disinformation."

The briefing is part of the government's efforts to promote New Zealand's integration into US-led wars against Russia and China. At the same time, war is being used to justify state censorship and surveillance, which will be used to suppress working class opposition to militarism, social inequality, and the worsening COVID-19 pandemic.

Ardern blamed the "Russian invasion of Ukraine" for the global "spike in fuel prices, food insecurity... [and] the threat of escalation or copy-cat action." In fact, Putin's invasion in February was a desperate and criminal response to years of military encirclement and provocations by the US and NATO powers—including the US-backed 2014 coup in Ukraine, which installed a viciously anti-Russian government supported by fascists.

Ukraine's population is being used as cannon fodder by the US and its allies, in the opening stages of a Third World War involving nuclear-armed powers. Driven by the historic

crisis of global capitalism, the imperialist powers are seeking to establish their hegemony over Russia and the entire Eurasian landmass, above all China, which Washington views as the main obstacle to its global dominance. The Ardern government has sent more than 200 New Zealand troops to Europe to assist in training Ukrainian soldiers and promises to send more aid to Kiev.

Ardern's statement that the Ukraine war could lead to "copy-cat action" is an apparent reference to the increasingly imminent danger of war between China and the US over Taiwan. The national security briefing points to China's "military cooperation" with Pacific countries, and expresses "concern" about China's "possible influence over New Zealand's political institutions, media and businesses."

The document outlines a worst case scenario of ongoing war in Ukraine and "open conflict in the Indo-Pacific region" within the next 15 years, "for example, through a potential miscalculation in the Taiwan Strait, and/or increased militarisation in the Pacific."

Here again, reality is turned on its head. The main source of "militarisation" is US imperialism, which has moved the bulk of its navy and air force into the Indo-Pacific region and strengthened military exercises, agreements and alliances—including with Taiwan, Australia, Japan and South Korea. The Ardern government has welcomed the US military presence, which the New Zealand ruling class considers vital to support its own domination over several Pacific Island countries.

The national security briefing notes that New Zealand is intervening heavily in several impoverished Pacific states to "support" their "police, customs, immigration and cyber security," and NZ is working "with our close partners, particularly Australia," to provide "direct defence and security contributions to the region." In July, foreign minister Nanaia Mahuta stated that the government is prepared to deploy NZ troops anywhere in the region to deal with "civil unrest."

The political establishment is highly conscious that its policies are fuelling anger and the growth of anti-capitalist

sentiment within the working class. While supporting US wars abroad, the Ardern government is overseeing soaring social inequality and inflation, exacerbated by the bailout of big business and the use of quantitative easing to provide tens of billions of dollars to the banks during the pandemic.

To placate the business elite, the Ardern government abandoned its zero COVID policy late last year and adopted the criminal policy of mass infection. The coronavirus has been allowed to spread out of control, overwhelming the public health system and killing well over 2,000 people so far this year.

The briefing warns that the “ongoing, shared and disruptive economic, social and political effects of COVID-19 and future pandemics” threatens national security. It also points to worsening climate change, armed conflicts, and “an ageing population, cycles of inequality and automation in the workforce,” which could lead to “greater divisions in our society” and the erosion of “trust in public institutions.”

In the event of a “dramatic [global] decline,” which would include war with both Russia and China, the document warns of a “New Zealand [that] is more polarised than ever, [where] trust in the institutions of state is diminished, threatening the foundations of our liberal democracy.”

In response, the document calls for “greater efforts... to detect disinformation campaigns and networks, and disrupt them in a coordinated way internationally, while calling out those that sponsor this activity.”

A primary focus for the security agencies is the policing of information and discussion on social media and the wider internet. Ardern declared on November 1: “Technology can bring us closer together; but it also gives new means by which those who wish to do us harm can spread extreme views and disinformation.” She later told reporters that “this [discussion] is not about censorship,” even though this is clearly the case.

In 2019 the government doubled its funding for the office of the Chief Censor and the Censorship Compliance Unit. Through the ChristchurchCalltoAction, New Zealand and other governments are collaborating with tech giants, including Microsoft, Facebook and Twitter, to devise mechanisms for rapidly removing or hiding online content deemed to be “extremist,” while promoting so-called “authoritative” media and government-approved sources. The *World Socialist Web Site* has been a key target of the social media platforms and Google, which have systematically censored and down-graded our articles.

What constitutes “extreme views and disinformation” is determined by the state. In a recent speech to the United Nations, Ardern gave the example of views which contradict the false US-NATO narrative on the war in Ukraine. This

means that any opposition to the war effort will in future be denounced as Russian or Chinese propaganda.

Tensions over COVID-19 public health measures are also being blamed on “enemy” interference. The draft national security briefing refers to “a spike in exposure to Russian disinformation or propaganda online after December 2021, much of this related to COVID-19. This spike preceded an increase in right-wing protests against COVID-19 measures and other issues in New Zealand.”

This is completely unsubstantiated and false. Early this year, parliament’s lawn in Wellington was occupied by far-right protesters demanding the removal of all public health measures. The action was explicitly modelled on the so-called “Freedom Convoy” in Canada, and similar far-right protests in the US and Australia, inspired by Trump and other right-wing politicians.

New Zealand’s Labour government is blaming Russia for promoting an anti-scientific agenda that it has itself fully embraced. Ardern herself has become a major source of disinformation on COVID, echoing US President Joe Biden’s lie that the worst of the pandemic is over. Her government has adopted nearly all the demands of the far-right protesters: it has removed mask and vaccine mandates and contact tracing systems, and declared that there will be no more lockdowns.

Workers and young people must oppose the increasing calls for censorship of so-called Russian or Chinese “disinformation,” which are part of the propaganda aimed at dragging New Zealand into the maelstrom of imperialist war, while cracking down on the basic democratic rights of workers themselves.

We call on readers to register to attend the upcoming webinar, called by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality: “For a mass movement of youth and students to stop the war in Ukraine!” The webinar is being held on Sunday, December 11 at 7:00 a.m. NZ time.



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