

# Top US official visits New Zealand to strengthen ties against China

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Last weekend Kurt Campbell, national security coordinator in the Biden administration, visited New Zealand in a delegation that included US State and Defence Department officials and Coast Guard representatives. It was the first stop in a Pacific tour that has continued this week with visits to the Cook Islands, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands.

Campbell met with New Zealand Defence Minister Andrew Little as part of the push to integrate the country more fully into the far-advanced US preparations for war against China. Driven by the worsening global economic crisis, US imperialism is rushing headlong into a war to redive the world at the expense of both Russia and China. Senior US general Mike Minihan recently stated that he believes war with China is likely within two years.

The NZ visit followed a meeting in San Diego between Biden and the Australian and UK prime ministers Anthony Albanese and Rishi Sunak, which confirmed that Australia will be supplied with nuclear-powered attack submarines as part of the anti-China AUKUS military pact. This has been accompanied by a militarist propaganda campaign from the Albanese government and the Australian media, with major newspapers calling for the reintroduction of conscription and even for Australia to acquire nuclear weapons.

The US is clearly concerned that New Zealand, a partner in the US-led Five Eyes intelligence sharing network, has sought to distance itself from the more belligerent anti-China rhetoric. The previous National Party government and the current Labour-Greens government have expanded the economic relationship with China—the largest market for New Zealand exports—while also strengthening military ties with the US. Wellington has sent troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, and is providing funding and training to Ukrainian forces for the US-NATO proxy war against Russia.

Campbell told journalists in Wellington that the US was responding to “an urgent set of security challenges in the Indo-Pacific, and like-minded countries are rallying independently to those challenges.” He called for increased

cooperation with New Zealand, saying: “We will be announcing soon that we want to launch a bilateral engagement between the United States and New Zealand on technology,” without going into any detail.

Campbell said there was “deep discussion” with New Zealand about increasing US engagement in the Pacific region and that NZ could be involved in AUKUS. Again he did not elaborate on what this would look like.

Clearly concerned to avoid antagonising China, New Zealand Prime Minister Chris Hipkins played down the significance of the talks. Asked what sort of involvement New Zealand could have in AUKUS, he told the media yesterday: “I don’t want to speculate on that while we’re continuing to have conversations.”

He added that New Zealand’s nuclear-free legislation was “a pretty big stumbling block to us being involved in AUKUS as it’s currently framed.” The legislation, introduced by the 1980s Labour government, prohibits the entry of nuclear-powered vessels into New Zealand waters.

In fact, the nuclear-free policy was significantly undermined in 2016 when the then-National Party government invited a US navy warship to visit New Zealand for the first time in decades. The decision was supported by Labour and the Greens. The US military has a policy of not revealing whether its ships or aircraft are nuclear-armed.

Moreover, as a member of the Five Eyes, New Zealand’s Waihopai spy base is integrated into US-led operations against China. Whistleblower Edward Snowden revealed that NZ’s Government Communications Security Bureau spies on China and other Asia-Pacific countries, feeding the intelligence to the US National Security Agency.

New Zealand’s role in this military-intelligence network means that it would be involved from the outset in any war between the US-Australia and China.

Hipkins’ reluctance to fully embrace AUKUS, for now, points to nervousness in ruling circles about the implications of the US confrontation with China. Wellington’s fraught balancing act is highlighted by the fact that, after Campbell’s visit, NZ foreign minister Nanaia Mahuta

departed on a visit to Beijing, where she met her counterpart, Qin Gang, to discuss stronger trade ties. The visit coincided with President Xi Jinping's meeting with Russia's Vladimir Putin to propose peace talks to end the conflict in Ukraine, something Washington vehemently opposes.

The accelerating charge towards war has revealed divisions in New Zealand's ruling elite. Sections of the media, including the nominally liberal *Daily Blog* and pro-US commentators such as Anne-Marie Brady, are pushing for a much firmer anti-China stance.

On the other hand, a worried *New Zealand Herald* editorial on March 18 said former Australian prime minister Paul Keating had made "valid points" in his criticism of AUKUS. Speaking on behalf of a minority faction of the Australian bourgeoisie, Keating raised concerns about the cost to Australian capitalism of joining a full-blown war against China.

The *Herald* noted the "lack of public say" over the details of AUKUS and questioned "whether it is strategically smart or good value," adding that "defence is gobbling up billions that could be spent on climate change." It said the deal "increases the chances of Australia being a substantial player in any US conflict with China. Were Australia to be a major target, New Zealand would be affected."

Concerns were also raised by former Green MP Gareth Hughes, who wrote in *Stuff* that nuclear war was now "terrifyingly possible in the next few years" and that New Zealand would be "required by treaty obligations to act" if Australia is attacked.

Hughes said New Zealand should take an "independent" stance, "focused on reducing tensions, finding solutions and building trust. War is never inevitable." As a model, he pointed to the role played by Helen Clark's Labour government during the brutal US war against Iraq. According to Hughes, "Twenty years ago New Zealand displayed its independent foreign policy by refusing to be railroaded into Bush's 'coalition of the willing', despite opposition from the National Party at the time."

This is a falsification of history. In fact, the Labour Party government sent dozens of army engineers to Iraq in 2003, after having already participated in the illegal invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, with the support of the pseudo-left Alliance. US embassy cables later released by WikiLeaks confirmed that the Clark government joined the Iraq war for commercial reasons, including to protect NZ dairy giant Fonterra's contract to supply Iraq.

Hughes' praise for the Clark government speaks to the fact that there is no anti-war faction in the political establishment. New Zealand is a minor imperialist power, and since World War II its ruling class has maintained a close alliance with the US and Australia in order to defend

its own interests in the Pacific region and more broadly.

The Green Party, as part of the present Labour-led government, has supported major increases in military spending, including new aircraft and navy vessels, aimed at boosting New Zealand's interoperability with the US and other allies in preparation for war. Along with the entire parliament and media establishment, the Greens support the escalating war against Russia, which is conceived of in Washington as a step towards war with China.

There is widespread opposition to war, as there was 20 years ago, when tens of millions of people joined protests throughout the world against the invasion of Iraq. But the failure of that movement to stop the invasion proves that war cannot be opposed through appeals to any faction of the capitalist class and its political parties, including Labour and its allies.

A genuine anti-war movement can only be built on the basis of socialist and internationalist principles. The working class must be united across borders in a movement to abolish the source of war: the capitalist system and its division of the world into rival nation-states.

We urge readers in New Zealand to attend the meeting on April 4, hosted by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality at Victoria University of Wellington, "The War in Ukraine and How to Stop It", to discuss these burning questions.



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