

New Zealand Prime Minister Hipkins “unwavering” in support of US-NATO war in Ukraine

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16 July 2023

At the conclusion of the NATO summit in Vilnius last week, New Zealand Prime Minister Chris Hipkins declared: “We will stand with Ukraine until this unjust war ends... it was an honour to shake hands with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and tell him this in person.”

Hipkins said that in his meetings with leaders, including German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Stove and French President Macron, there was “absolutely no weakening” in Europe’s support for Ukraine. He announced another \$NZ4 million support package for Kiev along with upgraded sanctions against Russian individuals and entities.

Hipkins’ remarks were made despite tensions over Zelensky’s failed bid for a specific timeline for NATO membership. At least for now, NATO, particularly the US and Germany, has chosen to escalate their war against Russia outside of the framework of a formal alliance with Ukraine. Under NATO’s charter, Ukraine’s membership would commit NATO powers to war against Russia.

En route to Vilnius, Hipkins stopped in Brussels to sign a trade deal with the EU, which NZ’s Labour government has trumpeted as a major victory. The pact is regarded as important in diversifying the country’s trading partnerships and reduce its reliance upon the Chinese market. Bilateral EU-NZ trade is now expected to grow by up to 30 percent within a decade.

Hipkins then travelled to Sweden, where he endorsed the country’s successful bid for NATO membership. Endorsing NATO’s expansion onto Russia’s doorstep, Hipkins declared: “Of course, it’s very important, it’s for a good reason that Sweden, after 200 years of non-alignment [has] applied for NATO membership.”

The prime minister’s invitation to Vilnius, following his predecessor Jacinda Ardern’s appearance at the 2022 Madrid summit, signaled a cementing of New Zealand’s partnership with NATO in the Indo-Pacific cohort known as AP4 that includes Australia, Japan and South Korea. Ardern’s

involvement in Madrid had helped to provide Indo-Pacific backing for NATO’s Strategic Concept, which put China firmly in the bloc’s sights.

As the WSWWS explained, only a fraction of the communiqué from the Vilnius summit deals with the war in Ukraine. “In the rest [of the document], NATO declares its intention to impose its will on the entire world.” Having instigated the war over Ukraine, the US-led NATO powers are utilizing it to organize a vast global military escalation. The war against Russia itself has taken on a Europe-wide dimension.

NATO’s expansion into the Indo-Pacific region in the name of Euro-Atlantic “security” is an extension of preparation for war against China. The communiqué warned Beijing against giving support to Russia and claimed that China challenged the alliance’s “interests, security and values,” and was seeking to “subvert the international order” via its control of key technological and industrial sectors, critical infrastructure, and strategic materials and supply chains.

When the document speaks of “global stability” and upholding a “rules-based international order,” this means the post-World War II “order” in which the US as the dominant imperialist power dictated the rules.

According to New Zealand’s foreign minister, Nanaia Mahuta, Wellington will, along with other AP4 partners, sign up to an “Individually Tailored Partnership Programme” (ITPP) with NATO. The pacts cover “areas of common interest” that include “the international rules based order, climate change, and cyber security.”

In a sharp rebuke, China’s Ambassador to NZ, Wang Xiaolong, warned Wellington not to “open the door to the devil” by aligning with a NATO bloc in the Asia-Pacific. “No matter how hard NATO attempts to whitewash its blood-tainted reputation by claiming itself as a ‘defensive’ alliance, it is, in essence, still a military bloc obsessed with so-called “absolute security,” Wang declared.

While fully embracing NATO's global expansionism, the New Zealand ruling elite seeks to retain a certain fiction of "independence." This is principally due to its ongoing balancing act between its economic reliance on China versus its longstanding geo-strategic alignment with US imperialism, which underwrites its own neo-colonial operations in the Pacific. There is also an acute awareness of deep-seated anti-war sentiment in the population.

Before departing overseas, Hipkins delivered a keynote speech to the NZ Institute of International Affairs where he referred to the "benefits of our independent foreign policy, our role as an honest broker." But, he continued, "independent does not mean neutral. As a country, we may be small, but we are not bystanders." After detailing a range of emerging threats, he said "we can't be passive. We need to invest in our defence and security capabilities at home."

The Labour-Green Party government has signaled its interest in joining the AUKUS pact, consisting of Australia, the UK and US and which could ultimately include partnerships with Japan and South Korea. While full membership of AUKUS is presently ruled out by New Zealand's long-standing anti-nuclear policy, which bars nuclear-powered vessels from entering NZ waters, the government is seeking to join a "second tier" of the agreement, which would give access to high-tech weaponry and communications.

Under pressure to lift its military budget from the current 1.4 percent of GDP to NATO's target of at least 2 percent, Labour boosted military spending by another \$NZ747 million in the May budget. This is mainly earmarked for lifting salaries across the armed forces, in a desperate attempt to stem personnel losses. Expensive hardware purchases will be made to the detriment of health, education and social welfare, already operating in crisis.

The situation facing New Zealand's ruling elite is increasingly intractable. The release last week of a new Foreign Policy Assessment by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) underscored deep concerns about the deteriorating international situation.

The document identifies three major global shifts: a move "from rules to power," from "economics to security" and from "efficiency to resilience." Collectively, it concludes these mean "many of the assumptions in relation to global and regional affairs that have underpinned New Zealand's foreign policy for a generation or more are coming under real and sustained pressure."

The document declares that Russia's "illegal" invasion of Ukraine has reshaped the global landscape, raising concerns about "reinvigorated hard power dynamics, such as nuclear deterrence and increased defence spending." It accuses China of assertively pursuing diplomatic, trade, security and

development initiatives aimed at "shaping international approaches, challenging international rules and norms, and promoting China's vision in these areas."

The Pacific, MFAT notes, is no longer "strategically benign," with the "risk of a shift in the strategic balance in the Pacific... now a present and serious concern." Australia and New Zealand are minor imperialist powers, exercising neo-colonial domination over the island nations of the Pacific region; both countries rely on their alliance with the US to push back against China's growing economic and diplomatic influence in the region.

Preparations are underway for armed conflict in the Pacific. Later this month New Zealand will take part in Australia's large Talisman Sabre military exercise, which involves 30,000 personnel from 11 countries, including Japan, South Korea, Germany, the UK, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Fiji.

On the economic front, MFAT warns that the country can no longer rely on the "durability" of trade liberalisation policies "which have been the foundation of its foreign, trade and economic policies for decades." States are turning towards protectionism to manage strategic risk and respond to problems such as climate change.

This means "New Zealand will be less able to prioritise economic priorities" and will need to "devote more energy and resources to defence and security imperatives, including to shore up economic resilience," it concludes. Inevitably, this will mean cuts to spending on social programs. Speaking from overseas, Hipkins bluntly ruled out any move by Labour to introduce either a wealth tax or capital gains tax after the October 14 election.

Whichever group of parties takes office will boost the military budget and further integrate into US-led alliances as the US-NATO war against Russia assumes global dimensions, that threatening to envelop China and the Pacific. The next government will impose the full burden of these conflicts and the worsening global economic crisis onto the working class, further fuelling explosive class struggles at home.



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