

New Zealand government and opposition maintain support for Israel's assault on Gaza

Tom Peters
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Over the past fortnight, the genocidal onslaught by Israel against the entire population of Gaza has provoked continuing protests by millions of people around the world, including in New Zealand, with more planned for the coming week.

The Palestinian people are facing atrocities comparable to those perpetrated by the Nazis during World War II. Netanyahu's Zionist regime is seeking to crush the resistance of the Palestinians against colonial oppression, and to ethnically cleanse Gaza through mass murder and by turning hundreds of thousands of people into homeless refugees.

More than 5,000 people including at least 2,000 children are confirmed dead, more than 15,000 are injured, and 1.4 million people, more than half the city's inhabitants, have been displaced. Israel's carpet bombing has destroyed tens of thousands of residential buildings, hundreds of schools and dozens of healthcare facilities. Israel has cut off food, water and fuel supplies in order to starve the population.

New Zealand's Labour Party—which suffered a landslide defeat in the October 14 election, but is still the caretaker government—continues to back Israel. So does the conservative National Party, which is in talks with the far-right ACT and New Zealand First on forming a new coalition government.

Following the breakout of Gaza led by Hamas on October 7, both Labour and National joined the US and all other imperialist powers in declaring support for Israel's "right to defend itself" against "terrorism"—the fraudulent justification for its unrestrained slaughter of Palestinians.

In a statement on October 17, Labour's prime minister Chris Hipkins announced a contribution of \$5 million towards addressing "urgent humanitarian needs in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank." The statement did not condemn Israel's bombardment and made no call for a ceasefire.

The next day, caretaker foreign minister Nanaia Mahuta posted on X: "The loss of lives from the devastating hospital blast in Gaza is horrific and inexcusable. New Zealand condemns the targeting of innocent civilians, and remain[s]

steadfast that the protection of civilians must remain a critical priority, as must adherence to Int humanitarian law."

This statement did not specifically condemn Israel, which ludicrously claimed that the Al Ahli hospital, where around 500 people were killed, was bombed by Hamas or Islamic Jihad. US President Joe Biden, whose government is bankrolling Israel's armed forces, also declared that the Palestinian groups had bombed the hospital—despite the fact that Israel has destroyed hundreds of medical facilities and civilian buildings.

On the basis of US and Israeli lies, the entire New Zealand media—Radio NZ, *Stuff*, Newshub, TVNZ, the *New Zealand Herald*—has "reported" that the perpetrator of the hospital bombing is "unclear" or "disputed."

Speaking to the radio station Waatea on October 18, Mahuta said: "We should condemn the actions of Hamas as a terrorist organisation, but the response should be proportionate from Israel." This time, she acknowledged "the fact that they [Israel] attacked a hospital and health professionals, which are protected under international law," and hypocritically called for "de-escalation."

This choice of words—denouncing Hamas as "terrorists" while raising that Israel's bombing of civilians and hospitals might not be "proportionate"—amounts to an endorsement of Israel's war crimes. In embracing the positions of the Zionist regime and Washington, Mahuta actually went beyond the New Zealand government's stated position, which designates the military wing of Hamas as a "terrorist organisation," but not the entire movement.

Mahuta became foreign minister after the 2020 election with considerable fanfare based on identity politics. In a February 4, 2021 speech, she described herself as "the first indigenous woman" in the role, and said her approach was based on Māori "values" such as "*manaaki*—kindness or the reciprocity of good will; [and] *whanaunga*—our connectedness or shared sense of humanity."

This "indigenous foreign policy" was a threadbare screen for New Zealand imperialism and its alliance with Washington, which Labour strengthened. The Labour

government sent troops to Britain to help train Ukrainians for the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, and it supported the further militarisation of the Pacific in preparation for war with China.

Following the March 15, 2019 terrorist attack on two mosques in Christchurch, Labour's then-prime minister Jacinda Ardern was glorified by the corporate media as a symbol of "kindness" and opposition to racism and xenophobia. This was always a pack of lies. Now, in its final days, the Labour government is justifying the mass murder of oppressed Palestinians by the US-backed Netanyahu regime.

Conscious of widespread anti-war sentiment and the discrediting of the Labour government in the eyes of ordinary people, Labour's parliamentary allies the Greens and Te Pāti Māori have issued hypocritical statements denouncing the assault on Gaza.

Green Party foreign affairs spokesperson Golriz Ghahraman said in a statement: "While the attack by Hamas on Israeli civilians was unconscionable and constitutes the gravest war crimes, nothing justifies the indiscriminate retaliation upon the trapped civilian population in Gaza by the Israeli Defence Force.... The international community must stand against these crimes against humanity and prevent ethnic cleansing."

This is an attempt to foster illusions in the same imperialist powers—the "international community"—which are providing Israel with the necessary weapons and funding for its barbaric war. The Greens were part of the Labour government for the past six years and backed its increases in military spending, including for the war in Ukraine. Before that, the party supported New Zealand's deployment of troops to the criminal US war in Afghanistan.

Te Pāti Māori (TPM) co-leader Debbie Ngarewa-Packer told Radio NZ on October 18 that Israel was guilty of "genocide, ethnic cleansing, apartheid": "There's not a 'two sides' situation here, we've only got one side living under military occupation... and we've got to stop pretending that all this started on the 7th of October." She added that the government was using the alliance with the US "as an excuse to be complicit or quiet."

Seeking to capitalize on the widespread popular opposition to Israel's onslaught on Palestinians, TPM has called for the expulsion of Israel's ambassador. During the election, the party advocated a policy of military "neutrality," which likely contributed to its candidate Hana-Rawhiti Maipi-Clarke defeating Labour's Mahuta in the electorate of Hauraki-Waikato.

In her RNZ interview, however, Ngarewa-Packer praised the New Zealand position on "Afghanistan and Ukraine in the recent past"—i.e., support for US-NATO

imperialism—falsely stating that this was in "contradiction" to its support for Israel. TPM is a capitalist party that was part of the 2008-2017 National Party-led coalition government, which repeatedly sent troops to Iraq and Afghanistan.

The world's population faces immense dangers. The war against Gaza has been seized upon by Washington and its allies to accelerate what is already the opening stages of a Third World War. The aim of US imperialism is nothing less than the redivision of the world, to seize control of resources and markets from Russia and China. New Zealand's ruling elite, as it did in World Wars I and II, intends to secure its share of the spoils by aligning with the dominant imperialist power.

Workers and youth who are joining protests against the bombing of Gaza must learn the lessons of the past. In 2003, the global mass protests against the US invasion of Iraq were derailed and defeated by the middle class parties and organisations, which subordinated them to pacifist appeals to the imperialist governments and the United Nations. In New Zealand, the Greens and pseudo-left organisations limited the protests to "pressuring" the Labour-led government. This government, which included the pseudo-left Alliance Party, sent troops to join in the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, and later to Iraq.

To succeed, the new anti-war movement must be armed with a revolutionary socialist strategy, which includes unwavering support for the Palestinian uprising against colonial oppression, and opposition to imperialist warmongering against Russia, China and Iran. It must be based on the understanding that the only way to stop war is through the mobilisation of the working class, in every country, to put an end to the capitalist system, which is the source of war.



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