

New Zealand's new PM visits Australia to strengthen military ties

Tom Peters

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New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon visited Sydney on Wednesday for talks with his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese. It was Luxon's first overseas trip since his conservative National Party formed a coalition government with the far-right parties NZ First and ACT.

The leaders' discussion focused on stronger strategic ties and military cooperation in the Pacific region. Australia and New Zealand, which are both regional imperialist allies of the United States, are ramping up their support for the US-led militarisation of the region in preparation for war against China.

The Biden administration is inflaming tensions by pouring weapons into Taiwan, boosting military ties with Australia, the Philippines, Korea and Japan, as well as staging repeated military exercises designed to provoke Beijing. Washington views China as the chief obstacle to its global economic and strategic hegemony.

Australia and New Zealand are also contributing to funding and training Ukraine's military for the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, and continue to support Israel's genocidal war against the people of Gaza, despite ongoing mass protests in both countries against the slaughter. This week, Albanese announced that Australia will deploy troops to Bahrain to join US forces in the Middle East, as Biden threatens a wider war against Yemen and Iran.

At a joint press conference, Luxon told reporters that Wellington and Canberra were "determined to work together as bedrock partners in the [Pacific] region," which he described as "an increasingly contested strategic environment."

Referring to China without naming it, Luxon said there were "countries within the region that are increasingly investing in military capability... And so I just want to make sure that we are very aligned, that we

are driving more interoperability, and in particular, we can be a force multiplier for Australia and vice versa."

Speaking about New Zealand and Australia's "shared interests and our common values," Luxon said the bond between the two countries was "forged with that Anzac spirit on the beaches of Gallipoli," a reference to the Australian and New Zealand (ANZAC) forces that led the disastrous invasion of Gallipoli in the Ottoman Empire during World War I.

Albanese also stated that "we have an extraordinary history when it comes to defence and security, going back to [the] Anzacs, something that we don't just commemorate but we celebrate as well."

Tens of thousands of Australian and NZ soldiers were killed in the barbaric slaughter of WWI so that their ruling classes could take part in the imperialist redivision of the world. Both countries used the war to seize colonies in the Pacific, with Australia annexing New Guinea and New Zealand invading Samoa.

Luxon confirmed that his government is "interested in exploring" whether New Zealand can participate in the AUKUS military cooperation agreement between the US, Australia and the UK. Albanese agreed that "there are opportunities for greater cooperation between our militaries," including through "the AUKUS arrangements," which he said was "very important for promoting security and stability in the Pacific."

The so-called first pillar of AUKUS involves supplying Australia with nuclear-powered attack submarines and expanding US military access to Australian bases. New Zealand will discuss joining the second "pillar" of the agreement, which involves increased sharing of military technology.

In a provocative statement to the media on December 12, New Zealand's new Defence Minister Judith

Collins attacked the previous Labour Party-led government for its slow progress towards joining AUKUS and accused Labour of taking “an anti-American stance.”

Labour leader Chris Hipkins told reporters there was no evidence of this, saying that the 2017-2023 government “had a very strong relationship with the American government.” He added that Labour had made clear that New Zealand was “happy to talk to the AUKUS partners” about playing a role in the agreement.

In fact, as Hipkins had made clear during a meeting with Albanese in April, there is bipartisan agreement on strengthening the alliance with both the US and Australia. The last parliament unanimously supported sending New Zealand troops to Britain to train Ukrainian forces for the war against Russia. Before the October election, both Labour and National committed to a major increase in military spending, from just over 1 percent of GDP to 2 percent of GDP.

Labour’s Defence Minister Andrew Little stated that the military build-up was necessary in case New Zealand was “called on to play a role should conflict break out” in the South China Sea.

A key role in the 2017-2020 Labour-led government was played by NZ First leader Winston Peters, who as foreign minister boosted New Zealand’s diplomatic and military activity in the Pacific, and vocally supported a greater US military presence in the region.

Peters has now resumed the positions of Foreign Affairs Minister and Deputy Prime Minister in the National-led coalition government, even though his right-wing nationalist party only got 6 percent of the votes.

Last week, Peters visited Fiji for talks with the country’s government and to visit the headquarters of the Pacific Island Forum (PIF), which includes 18 small island nations. He told Radio NZ (RNZ) that it was “very, very critical [to ensure that] right across the blue continent, the Pacific Islands—Micronesia, Melanesia—are all on the same wavelength as to the issues of security and future prosperity of the region.”

He said New Zealand wanted to speed up decision-making processes in the PIF, which Washington, Canberra and Wellington are using as a mechanism for pressuring Pacific countries to align against China. “These are not comfortable days, these are days of

crisis and we’ve got to step up and ensure that we understand that,” Peters told RNZ.

As was the case in the lead-up to World War I and II, the Pacific region is being militarised by the imperialist powers and transformed into a cauldron of explosive tensions. The statements by Luxon and Peters must be taken as a warning that, despite New Zealand’s continued dependence on trade with China, the ruling class is committed to playing its part, in lockstep with Australia, in what would be a catastrophic war involving nuclear-armed powers.

None of the capitalist governments or parties offers any alternative. The only way to stop a Third World War, which has already begun with the conflict over Ukraine and Israel’s genocide in Gaza, is through the mobilisation of the international working class to overthrow the capitalist system, which is the source of war, and reorganise the world along socialist lines.



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