

New Zealand personnel to assist in US-led bombing of Yemen

Tom Peters
25 January 2024

Six New Zealand Defence Force personnel are being sent to the Middle East to assist with selecting targets for the illegal US-led bombing campaign against Yemen.

The deployment was announced on Tuesday by Prime Minister Christopher Luxon, who declared it was necessary to stop the attacks by Yemen's Houthi forces on commercial ships in the Red Sea—about 15,000 kilometres away from New Zealand. He presented the operation as “collective self-defence of ships in the Middle East, in accordance with international law,” saying: “Our personnel will support coalition forces in carrying out precision attacks on identified military targets.”

No further details were released. The deployment was announced without any debate or even the formality of a vote in parliament.

Foreign Minister Winston Peters, who leads the right-wing nationalist New Zealand First Party, declared: “These efforts support international security and the free flow of trade on which New Zealanders rely.” Peters, Luxon and Defence Minister Judith Collins presented the deployment as a limited six-month commitment which was unrelated to the Israel-Gaza conflict. “I think conflating the two issues is very unhelpful,” Luxon said.

Such statements fly in the face of reality. The United States and its imperialist allies, including the UK, Australia, Canada and now New Zealand, are bombing Yemen in order to support the genocide being carried out by Israel against the population of Gaza. The Houthis' actions are aimed at disrupting supplies for Israel's military, which has murdered more than 30,000 people in the Gaza Strip, reduced entire cities to rubble, destroyed the public health system and cut off almost all supplies of food, fuel and water to more than 2

million people.

While funding and arming Israel's forces to massacre Palestinians, Washington is expanding the war throughout the Middle East. Israel, backed by the US, has targeted Iranian-linked forces in Syria and Iraq and Hezbollah militias in Lebanon. Yemen has already endured a decade-long genocidal war and blockade by Saudi Arabia, also backed by the US, which has killed hundreds of thousands of civilians.

The aim of US imperialism is to establish complete domination over the resource-rich Middle East by subjugating Iran and its allies. This is one front in an escalating global conflict, which includes the US-NATO war against Russia over Ukraine, and the militarisation of the Indo-Pacific region in preparation for war against China, American imperialism's main economic and geostrategic rival.

The statements of Luxon and his ministers are grossly hypocritical. While condemning the Houthis for threatening “peace and security” in the Red Sea, the New Zealand government supports the genocide of Palestinians, which Luxon presents as an act of self-defence by Israel.

Foreign Minister Peters said the disruption of shipping could affect global food supplies, threatening “hundreds of millions of people” with “starvation.” He said nothing about the mass starvation being caused by Israel's blockade of Gaza.

The decision to join another US-led war in the Middle East has triggered outrage from ordinary people, with numerous comments on social media accusing the government of complicity in genocide. One X/Twitter user, Lachlan, wrote: “When faced with the choice of advancing a ceasefire in Gaza, or escalating the US military response to Yemen, Luxon's cabinet chose the latter. The free flow of trade &

blood.”

Another X user said: “Absolutely appalling... Goes against everything we stand for, and for what gain? Getting to be pals with Genocide Joe? Disgusting.”

Thousands of workers and young people in New Zealand have participated in global protests against the genocide in Gaza for the past three-and-a-half months, with more actions planned for this weekend.

The opposition Labour Party—which supported Israel’s bombardment of Gaza when it was still leading the government until late November—and its ally the Green Party hypocritically criticised the deployment to the Red Sea.

Labour leader Chris Hipkins told the media on Wednesday: “There’s no UN resolution to back this action, so it’s not one that I would be backing.” This position leaves room for Labour to support military action in future, if it is rubber stamped by the United Nations.

Labour foreign affairs spokesperson David Parker told Radio NZ that the conflict with Yemen “has shades of Iraq.” He stated that in 2003 the then-Labour government, “despite all the pressure from the United States, Australia, and Great Britain at the time, stayed out of the conflict in Iraq, when Iraq was invaded.”

This is a falsification of history. Helen Clark’s Labour government sent 61 combat engineers to Iraq in 2003 to assist with the illegal imperialist war. WikiLeaks later revealed that the Clark government sent troops after pressure from the US, including a threat to end New Zealand dairy company Fonterra’s exports to Iraq.

Labour and its coalition partner, the pseudo-left Alliance, also sent troops to join the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. New Zealand troops were part of the occupation of Afghanistan for two decades under Labour and National-led governments.

The 2017-2023 Labour-led coalition government, led by Jacinda Ardern, which included the Green Party, continued New Zealand’s military involvement in the Middle East. About a dozen NZ personnel have been based in Bahrain assisting US operations in the region since 2013.

The Ardern government deployed more than 100 soldiers to Britain to assist with training Ukrainian conscripts to fight in the US-NATO proxy war against Russia. In addition, the Labour government boosted

military spending and supported an increased US military presence in the Pacific region, as part of war preparations against China.

Some media commentators and academics have expressed concern that New Zealand’s open alignment with the US against Yemen is undermining the claim—endlessly repeated by bourgeois politicians of all stripes—that the country pursues an “independent foreign policy.”

The truth is that New Zealand, as a minor imperialist power, has relied for decades on a de facto alliance with the United States to support its neo-colonial domination over much of the Pacific region. The country is a member of the US-led Five Eyes intelligence sharing network (which also includes Australia, Canada and Britain) and has been involved in numerous US-led wars since the end of World War II, from Korea to Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq and now against Yemen.

As the US charges towards war against Iran, Russia and China, the New Zealand ruling class is planning a major increase in military spending so it can participate and profit from the new redivision of the world. No party in parliament opposes this agenda. To stop this catastrophic Third World War, those who are joining the global anti-war movement must adopt a socialist program aimed at uniting the working class to put an end to capitalism—the source of imperialist war and genocide.



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