

# New Zealand strengthens military ties with Philippines against China

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New Zealand and the Philippines have agreed to sign a mutual defence logistics agreement by the end of the year that will provide for closer cooperation between their militaries.

New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon secured the deal during a tour of Southeast Asian nations from April 14?20 which included Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines, ostensibly to strengthen trade. Accompanying Luxon were 25 business leaders and several reporters.

In Manila, defence and security emerged as the main “closer relationship” priority. Luxon declared: “President Marcos and I are directing our officials to get the legal underpinnings in place to get our militaries to be able to work alongside one another in a more frictionless manner.”

The official communiqué emphasised “strong existing bilateral defense cooperation” and committed to “exploring new frameworks of cooperation to deepen defense ties.”

While China was not directly mentioned, the leaders expressed “serious concerns” about “recent actions” in the South China Sea—a clear swipe at Beijing. They repeatedly stated the importance of international law, freedom of navigation, and the UN Convention on Law of the Sea—all references to the “rules” through which Washington, supported by its allies, maintains its global hegemony.

Last month the New Zealand embassy in Manila joined the US in putting out two statements declaring it was “deeply concerned” at “dangerous actions” taken by Chinese vessels at Second Thomas Shoal. The embassy alleged China’s use of water cannons and contact by vessels could “threaten lives at sea.” China sharply disputed Manila’s version of events.

The Philippines, a former American colony, is playing a growing role in Washington’s aggressive confrontation

with Beijing, in the South China Sea in particular. New Zealand, along with Australia, is increasingly integrated into the US-led war drive in the region.

The pact will allow New Zealand to carry out more multilateral maritime operations, port visits and to participate in joint military exercises. The Philippines and United States are hosting the 16,000-strong Balikatan war games, the largest ever, over the coming week, which Australian soldiers will join. New Zealand has observer status.

The deal is also a further step in the Philippines’ integration into the US-led web of alliances. It follows a visit by President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr to Australia in February, where he addressed parliament on the need to “join forces, together with our partners, in the face of threats to the rule of law, to stability, and to peace.”

Australia is a major ally of the US and a member of the top-level Five Eyes global intelligence sharing network, along with the US, New Zealand, Canada and Britain.

The Luxon-Marcos meeting concluded with a pledge to sign the Mutual Logistics Supporting Arrangement by the end of 2024, and a Status of Visiting Forces Agreement (SOVFA), paving the way for New Zealand military personnel to visit the Philippines. Until now, Australia has been the only country, other than the US, that has a SOVFA with the Philippines.

While in Singapore, Luxon also talked up the prospect of a stronger defence relationship, including potentially allowing Singapore drones into New Zealand airspace for testing. In Thailand, he secured an agreement with Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin to increase communication and interoperability between their defence forces.

*Newshub* reported that the Philippines security pact was announced after Luxon made “very fast friends” with Marcos. Luxon told Marcos over a toast: “Mr President Marcos and First Lady Liza, we knew—Amanda [his wife]

and I—when we first met you, we’d like you.” A state dinner was held in Luxon’s honour, and he was invited to stay at the president’s official residence.

Since coming to power in 2022, Marcos has ended the efforts of the previous president, Rodrigo Duterte, to ease tensions with China. He has revived and extended US basing arrangements in the Philippines, including those directly adjacent to the South China Sea, as well as conducting joint war games with the US military.

Luxon is openly embracing an increasingly authoritarian regime. Marcos, son of the brutal US-backed dictator Ferdinand Marcos, has praised his father’s rule. He has continued the notorious “war on drugs” of his predecessor Duterte, with extra-judicial killings, arbitrary arrests and “disappearances” aimed at terrorising the poorest layers of the population.

Asked by reporters if New Zealand should be establishing military ties with a government that had “killed so many of its own people,” Luxon basically defended the regime. He described Marcos as a leader who had been “quite strident about making sure that the rule of law is something that he and his government are very much focused on.”

Pushed why he hadn’t raised human rights concerns with Marcos, Luxon dismissively responded: “Our focus was on other things, in this conversation we were focused very much on regional tensions.”

Significantly, Marcos is a supporter of the AUKUS (Australia/UK/US) pact, under which Australia will acquire nuclear-powered attack submarines. Along with Japan, the New Zealand government is pushing to join Pillar Two of the alliance, which involves sharing advanced military technology.

Former NZ prime minister Helen Clark and former Australian foreign minister Bob Carr, among others, have criticised efforts to join AUKUS, saying it is a shift away from New Zealand’s “independent foreign policy.” Clark’s 1999-2008 Labour government, however, played a key role in boosting the military alliance with the US by sending troops to join the illegal wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The New Zealand ruling elite has its own imperialist interests to advance. Last August, releasing the then Labour government’s Defence Policy Review, Defence Minister Andrew Little warned that in the South China Sea, “where \$20 billion of our exports flows through every year, we have a stake in that.” He added: “We may be called on to play a role should conflict break out. We need to be equipped for that and prepared for it.”

The far-right National Party-led coalition government is carrying forward the same foreign policy agenda. Luxon’s tour came after Foreign Minister Winston Peters and Defence Minister Judith Collins visited the US to cement New Zealand’s presence in the anti-China alliance. Peters also attended a NATO foreign ministers’ meeting in Brussels early this month, where he reiterated the New Zealand government’s support for the escalating US-NATO proxy war against Russia over Ukraine.

On his return home, Luxon boasted that with surging tensions between Israel and Iran, it was “important that New Zealand stood up for its values and continued to push for diplomacy.” He said his government had called for a “cessation of hostilities” and urged “restraint” by both sides.

This is a complete fraud. The current government and its Labour predecessor legitimised the bombing and blockade of the Gaza Strip which have killed more than 33,000 people by insisting on Israel’s so-called “right of self-defence.” New Zealand troops have been sent to assist in the US-led bombing of Yemen, in retaliation against Yemeni forces’ attempts to disrupt the supply of weapons going to Israel.

On every front—in the Middle East, against Russia, and against China—New Zealand is firmly aligned with US imperialism’s wars, militarisation and provocations aimed at redividing the world’s territory and resources. The establishment of military ties with the Marcos regime in the Philippines is part of this. These facts reveal the true “values” of the New Zealand ruling class.

Workers and young people, however, overwhelmingly oppose war and have taken part in hundreds of protests against the genocide in Gaza. This anti-war movement must be expanded to oppose the NATO-Russia war and the militarisation of the Indo-Pacific. Above all, to prevent a catastrophic Third World War, the working class must fight for a socialist political program, aimed at abolishing the capitalist system that is the root cause of war.



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