

New Zealand government seeks closer ties with Trump, Modi administrations

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In two separate overseas trips last week, New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon and Foreign Minister Winston Peters moved to strengthen bilateral ties with the administrations of US President Donald Trump and India's Narendra Modi.

The visits took place amid a sharp lurch to the right by ruling elites around the world in response to the escalating global economic crisis of capitalism and the US-led drive to imperialist war. New Zealand is embroiled in these developments.

While Luxon feted and embraced the far-right Hindu supremacist Modi, Peters kowtowed before Trump's officials just as the US immigration gestapo illegally rounded up and deported hundreds of people to be imprisoned in El Salvador.

New Zealand's National Party-NZ First-ACT Party coalition is a far-right government. Since assuming office after the 2023 election, which it won due to mass disaffection among workers with its Labour predecessor, it has imposed a vicious austerity program with thousands of job cuts, skyrocketing living costs and attacks on public services, including health and education.

Luxon and Peters pledged to work closely with Trump following his election victory, in particular to strengthen New Zealand's military-strategic alliance with the US. New Zealand armed forces currently provide training for Ukrainian conscripts in Britain to fight in the US-NATO proxy war against Russia, and NZ Defence Force specialists are assisting with the imperialist bombing of Yemen.

The Luxon government has refused to condemn Trump's threat to take over and ethnically cleanse Gaza or oppose Israel's recent resumption of its genocidal bombing campaign.

In his visit to New York and Washington Peters, who is deputy prime minister and leader of the anti-immigrant NZ First Party, sought to boost the government's

credentials as a loyal Trump ally. After the first round of meetings with US officials, Peters told reporters the discussions had centred on "what they want of us" but he would not elaborate on US "expectations."

Peters' most important meeting was with his counterpart, Secretary of State Marco Rubio. Peters said he was "seriously pleased with the outcome." When asked for specifics, Peters bluntly replied, "it's work in progress," insisting he would brief the Cabinet at home before speaking publicly.

Peters gave no clue whether the talks were enough to secure New Zealand an exemption from agricultural tariffs Trump has promised to impose on imports from April 2. In the year ending in March, the US became New Zealand's second largest export market, behind China and ahead of Australia.

In the year to last December total exports to the US were worth \$NZ16.04 billion. New Zealand imported \$9.6 billion from the US, making a trade surplus in New Zealand's favour, something the Trump administration will likely view with hostility.

Asked about US expectations of increased military spending, Peters told the media, "You can't surely expect the Pacific and the rest of the world to be looked after by one country and everybody else not pay anything at all. So at the very least, we knew we had to increase our expenditure, and I'll tell my colleagues what that figure is."

NZ Defence Minister Judith Collins has already indicated the military budget is looking to be doubled, to 2 percent of GDP, which will be paid for by further gutting social programs. The opposition Labour Party supports a major increase. Labour insisted, when it was leading the government, that New Zealand had to be ready for war against China.

Asked about Israel's renewed bombing of Gaza, tearing up the temporary ceasefire, Peters refused to criticise

Israel. “We’ve got to find out how this happened. What started it? What’s the background?” he said. Peters previously indicated he is amenable to any US-dictated plan for seizing and “reconstructing” Gaza.

Peters released a statement on his meeting with Rubio declaring: “We agreed that we should continue to work together for a free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific.” This included promoting the “prosperity and stability of the Pacific Islands.”

A read out by the US State Department also said the pair discussed “avenues for strengthening defence co-operation through burden sharing, allowing our militaries to work more closely together, and ensuring security and economic strength in the Pacific region.” So-called “burden sharing” refers to the Trump administration’s policy of pushing allies to escalate their defence spending, to shift the expense away from the US.

The references to the Indo-Pacific are code for preparations for war with China, which the White House regards as the main threat to American imperialism’s global hegemony. Peters and Rubio doubtless discussed the recent furore over Chinese naval ships that carried out exercises in the Tasman Sea. The New Zealand and Australian governments and media seized on the exercises to promote further military upgrades.

Peters earlier met with Trump’s USAID acting head, Peter Marocco, and his national security adviser, Mike Waltz, declaring they had a “very frank and open discussion” about how important aid was for the Pacific. He insisted that the US “gets our point of view in terms of how essential it is.”

The Biden administration had pledged \$US1 billion in aid to the Pacific to help counter China’s influence. Disbursements have now been frozen for 90 days pending a “review” of all aid spending under Trump’s “America First” policies. Peters rejected suggestions that the US would be “pulling back” from the Pacific. “We don’t know that yet. Let’s find out in April, when that full review is done on USAID,” he told reporters.

Peters, a qualified lawyer, remained totally silent on Trump’s sweeping attacks on democratic rights and moves toward dictatorship. Rubio is a prime mover behind the seizure and arrest by Homeland Security agents of Columbia University graduate student Mahmoud Khalil, whose only “offense” is opposing the genocide in Gaza.

Silence denotes consent and complicity. While New Zealand authorities have not yet carried out similar arrests, Peters recently made belligerent threats against

pro-Palestine groups in New Zealand, smearing them as “illegal” and “racist.”

Peters’ week-long US trip reveals how thoroughly the New Zealand ruling elite is aligning itself with the forces of fascism and preparations for war to redivide the world.

The same agenda was behind Luxon’s trip to India, during which he ingratiated himself with the authoritarian Modi. The visit was ostensibly to open the door to a free trade deal between the two countries, and for Luxon to address the Raisina Dialogue, India’s annual conference covering security and geopolitics.

In his Raisina speech, Luxon reiterated his commitment to boost spending on the military. He provocatively denounced China, saying its recent naval exercises “sent a signal that alarmed many of my fellow citizens.” He later told reporters that the exercises showed that New Zealand and the Pacific could not be considered a “benign environment.”

Such statements are thoroughly hypocritical. New Zealand has taken part in numerous military exercises aimed at provoking China, including in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait.

Luxon and Modi signed a defence cooperation pact focussed on maritime security. India is part of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), a quasi-alliance against China that also includes the US, Japan and Australia.

China’s ambassador to New Zealand Wang Xiaolong indirectly criticised Luxon’s statements, posting on X: “It hardly serves your best interests when you try to promote one significant relationship by damaging another.”

The pronouncements by Peters and Luxon are a further warning that, despite New Zealand’s extensive economic relations with China, the ruling elite is committed to supporting the US in its preparations for a catastrophic world war involving nuclear-armed powers.



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