

New Zealand ruling elite escalates preparations for war

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As the Trump administration advances war preparations against China, New Zealand has joined a host of nations drastically boosting their military budgets. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, global military spending increased by 9.4 percent in 2024 to reach \$US2.718 trillion.

New Zealand's National Party-led coalition government recently released a multi-billion dollar Defence Capability Plan that will nearly double military spending from just over 1 percent to 2 percent of GDP within eight years. This involves \$NZ9 billion in new spending over the coming four years.

Prime Minister Christopher Luxon said the committed amount "is the floor, not the ceiling, of funding for our defence force."

The far-right government is escalating its involvement in the war against Russia. Luxon announced on April 22 that up to 100 NZ Defence Force (NZDF) personnel will continue to train Ukrainian soldiers in the UK and throughout Europe, and provide intelligence, liaison and logistics support through to December 2026, bringing the total value of support to \$152 million.

The announcement came on the eve of Luxon's latest trip to Europe, which began in Britain with a meeting with Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer. The pair visited a military training site in the south of England to see the Operation Interflex facility, where NZ has helped train over 53,000 Ukrainian Armed Forces personnel, including conscripts.

Luxon addressed the Ukrainian soldiers, cynically hailing them as "heroes" while also calling President Volodymyr Zelensky a hero. In fact, Zelensky leads a fascistic police state, which is sacrificing hundreds of thousands of young men in the service of US-NATO imperialism and throwing opponents of war in prison, including the socialist Bogdan Syrotyuk.

The war is part of a global resurgence of imperialist barbarism, including the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza, the bombing of Yemen and threats against Iran and China.

Driven by the crisis of capitalism, the imperialist powers are driven to violently redivide the world and its resources. New Zealand, a minor imperialist ally of the US, is seeking to ensure its place in this bloody carve-up.

A joint statement by the UK and NZ governments expressed their commitment to substantially increase defence spending and to renew "our historic defence partnership to make it fit for the future, and to deepen cooperation in our defence capabilities and industries."

Starmer welcomed NZ's participation in the UK-led Carrier Strike Group deployment in the Indo-Pacific, and "ongoing consultations" regarding Wellington's "potential opportunities for participation in AUKUS Pillar II," an anti-China military pact involving Australia, the UK and US.

Luxon then travelled to Turkey for the ANZAC Day service, which commemorates the disastrous 1915 landing of British, Australian and New Zealand troops at Gallipoli during World War I. As the WSWs noted, the April 25 holiday in Australia and New Zealand is "always a spectacle of militarist reaction and warmongering." This year, it was held under conditions where the imperialist powers are threatening an even greater calamity than previous world wars.

Luxon was the first NZ prime minister in a decade to visit the battlefield, declaring, "Gallipoli is a name etched into New Zealand's national identity." While his speech was littered with hypocritical calls for "peace," New Zealand's ruling class is preparing for war. Echoing calls internationally for "whole-of-society" militarisation, right-wing *New Zealand Herald* commentator Matthew Hooton wrote a frothing column last week advocating compulsory military training to "transform NZ society."

China is the main target of the relentless war build-up. According to the Defence Capability Plan, echoing US propaganda points, "China's assertive pursuit of its strategic objectives is the principal driver for strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific, and it continues to use all of its tools of statecraft in ways that can challenge both international norms of behaviour and the security of other states. Of

particular concern is the rapid and non-transparent growth of China's military capability."

China, however, has no overseas military bases in the Pacific. It is the United States which, under successive administrations, has shifted the bulk of its navy into the region to encircle and threaten China, while strengthening military ties with Japan, India, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Australia, NZ and countries throughout the Indo-Pacific.

Since taking office in November 2023, NZ Foreign Minister Winston Peters, leader of the populist NZ First Party in the coalition, has visited nearly every Pacific nation to intensify political pressure to fall into line with the US-led war drive. This has involved a bitter diplomatic row with the tiny NZ semi-colony of the Cook Islands over its new strategic agreement with China.

Peters' most recent Pacific trip took him to Hawaii on April 15, where he met with officials, including the US Indo-Pacific Command Chief Admiral Samuel Paparo. New Zealand's partnership with the United States, he declared, "remains one of our most longstanding and important, particularly when seen in the light of our joint interests in the Pacific and the evolving security environment."

As part of the military build-up in the Asia-Pacific, an NZDF contingent has joined Bersama Shield, an annual exercise in the Malayan Peninsula involving militaries from the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore. According to an NZDF statement, the exercise is designed to "enhance cooperation and interoperability by working together in a warfighting scenario," and to deepen its "commitment to the South East Asia region."

Defence Minister Judith Collins is visiting the Philippines this week to sign a Status of Visiting Forces Agreement, agreed last year, to strengthen military cooperation. Washington and its allies are preparing the Philippines to serve as a staging ground for conflict over Taiwan.

Such preparations are alarmingly advanced. Last September, a New Zealand Navy vessel sailed through the Taiwan Strait alongside Australian and Japanese warships on their way to exercises in the South China Sea, deliberately heightening tensions with Beijing.

In another provocative move aimed at Beijing, a delegation of New Zealand parliamentarians, members of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Taiwan, visited the island this month. The seven MPs from National, Labour, NZ First and ACT met with Taiwan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Lin Chia-lung and President Lai Ching-te.

Last October, Lai Ching-te delivered an inflammatory speech to mark National Day, which commemorates the 1911 revolution that led to the founding of the Republic of China, the formal name of Taiwan. Lai challenged the One

China policy, antagonising Beijing while expressing support for US imperialism and its preparations for war against the Chinese mainland.

New Zealand does not formally recognise Taiwan but "acknowledges" Beijing's position that Taiwan is an inalienable part of the Peoples' Republic. Beijing opposes independence for Taiwan as it would set a precedent for carving up Chinese territory more broadly, while allowing the island to become a US military staging ground for attacks against the mainland.

China's embassy in New Zealand issued a furious statement condemning the Taipei visit. It accused the NZ MPs of "wrongdoings" and "colluding with 'Taiwan independence' separatist forces." An embassy spokesperson said the trip severely violated "the solemn political commitments made by New Zealand to China when the two countries established diplomatic ties" in 1972.

New Zealand's entire political establishment, including the opposition Labour and Green parties, along with the corporate media, are busy stoking anti-Chinese hysteria. Labour leader Chris Hipkins told Radio New Zealand that the new Defence Capability Plan builds upon those made by the previous Labour-led government. In 2023, Labour's Defence Minister Andrew Little declared that NZ had a "stake" in the South China Sea and signed strategic pacts with Fiji and Japan.

An immense price is being paid by the working class for the huge military build-up. The government has frozen wages across the public sector and sacked thousands of workers. The healthcare and education systems are run-down and starved of funds.

The first ever 24-hour strike by senior doctors is being held this week. It is the latest in a rising struggle of medical workers, including young doctors, nurses and laboratory technicians against underfunding, under-staffing and low pay in the public health system, allied with the threat of privatisation. Working people will not accept the imposition of austerity at home and war abroad.



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