

New Zealand government feigns neutrality in US-Israeli war against Iran

Tom Peters
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New Zealand's right-wing National Party-led coalition government is seeking to portray itself as uninvolved in the murderous US-Israeli assault on Iran and neutral in the escalating war in the Middle East.

On June 13, Prime Minister Christopher Luxon described Israel's unprovoked missile strikes against Iran as "unwelcome" and "potentially catastrophic." He told reporters, "The risk of miscalculation is high. That region does not need any more military action... What we want to see is the parties coming together and having a conversation."

Speaking to Radio NZ on June 17, however, Foreign Minister Winston Peters refused to condemn Israel's ongoing attacks, which by then had killed hundreds of people. Asked whether his government "supports Israel taking this unilateral action," Peters replied: "we do not take sides in a conflict of this nature."

He called for "de-escalation and diplomacy" but added that "Iran is not an innocent player in this." He said both sides were engaged in "provocative behaviour." Such statements amount to a falsification of what is taking place and a defence of Israel.

The regime in Israel, led by fascist criminals, is engaged in a genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza and has waged illegal wars against Lebanon, Syria and now Iran. Its aim, working with the full collaboration of the US, is to expand Israel's borders and redivide the entire Middle East in favour of the imperialist powers.

The pretext given by Israel—that Iran was close to producing a nuclear weapon—is a transparent lie, just like the lies that Iraq had "weapons of mass destruction" that were told to justify the criminal US-led invasion and destruction of Iraqi society.

After President Donald Trump demanded the "unconditional surrender" of Iran's government and

said there were no plans to kill its leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei "for now," the *New Zealand Herald* asked Peters on June 18 whether he would support a US strike on uranium enrichment in Iran.

The foreign minister replied that "we do not believe in war when we haven't fully exhausted negotiations and diplomacy." He added that New Zealand was a "small country, way out here in the Southwest Pacific... I wish New Zealanders would understand our limitations here."

The reality, however, is that New Zealand is actively supporting Israeli and US military operations in the Middle East. In January 2024, a group of New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) personnel were sent to Saudi Arabia to assist in the US bombing of targets in Yemen, in response to the Houthi forces' efforts to stop ships from supplying the Israeli war machine.

New Zealand is a minor imperialist power allied with the US and a member of the US-led Five Eyes intelligence sharing network, raising further questions about its involvement. Asked during a press conference on June 16 whether New Zealand had received advance notice from the US about the attack on Iran, Peters replied, "Well, we don't make those discussions public."

If the NZ military had foreknowledge of the illegal Israeli missile strike and kept quiet, that would make it complicit in the attack.

The far-right Platform podcast's host Sean Plunket asked Peters the next day whether or not the NZ military personnel stationed in Saudi Arabia had "provided any intelligence or material support to the Israeli operation" against Iran. The foreign minister replied: "Even if I could confirm that, I would not be doing that," because to do so would endanger the lives of these personnel.

The entire political establishment is nervous about widespread anti-war sentiment in New Zealand, which has been expressed in repeated protests against the genocide in Gaza.

The opposition Labour Party's deputy leader Carmel Sepuloni told RNZ on June 17, "we don't support what Israel is doing and we don't support [Iran's] response either." Like Peters, she called for "diplomacy" between the two sides.

Sepuloni expressed support for the government's decision to join Canada, Australia, the UK and Norway in imposing sanctions on Israel's extreme right-wing Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir. She called for "greater sanctions," including on companies operating illegally in the occupied Palestinian territories.

All of this is completely hollow and is intended to divert attention from the fact that Labour continues to support the military alliance with the US, which is funding and supplying Israel's military and supports the complete ethnic cleansing of Gaza and war against Iran.

Previous Labour Party-led governments have sent troops to the criminal US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2022 Jacinda Ardern's Labour-led government, which included the Greens, sent hundreds of troops to Britain to assist in training Ukrainian conscripts to fight in the US-NATO proxy war against Russia.

Labour agrees with the current government's plan to double military spending over the next few years, from 1 to 2 percent of GDP—at the expense of social programs that working people rely on. The aim, spelled out in numerous official documents and statements, is to prepare the military for joint operations with the US and Australia, particularly against China, which is considered the main "threat" to US global hegemony.

The war against Russia over Ukraine, the genocide in Gaza, the war against Iran and the military build-up against China are all interconnected fronts in a rapidly developing world war aimed at seizing resources and markets and resolving the crisis of capitalism centred in the US.

New Zealand's ruling elite is preparing to deepen its involvement on all these fronts, behind the backs and against the will of the population, who are overwhelmingly against war. The working class must take action to stop the war, but for this it needs its own

socialist political party and strategy—in opposition to all the capitalist parties including Labour and its allies.

The only way to put an end to war is through the unified action of the international working class to abolish the source of war: the capitalist system. Those who agree with this must take the decision to become politically active and join the Socialist Equality Group, which is fighting to build a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution, in New Zealand.



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