

New Zealand PM affirms support for NATO military escalation

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New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon attended the NATO summit at The Hague on June 24-25 during an overseas trip that included a stopover in Beijing to meet with Chinese President XI Jinping.

Luxon was at the summit as part of NATO's Indo-Pacific 4 (IP4) grouping which consists of Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and Australia. The four non-member countries have since 2021 been regular invitees as NATO forges closer ties with its so-called "partner" countries in the Indo-Pacific to prepare for war with China.

Luxon was the only top leader of the IP4 present, the other three countries sending alternates, including Australia's deputy prime minister, Richard Marles. Suggestions that US President Donald Trump would meet separately with the group failed to eventuate.

As the WSWs has explained, the NATO summit marked a historical turning point. In the presence of Trump, the 32 member states committed to a massive rearmament program, pledging to commit at least 5 percent of GDP to their militaries. "Unprecedented in both scale and ambition, this buildup is not only directed against Russia and China—it targets the working class in every country," the WSWs noted.

The imperialist alliance's subservience to the fascist Trump was highlighted by NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte, who referred to him as "daddy" and congratulated him for getting the massive funding increase approved, while also lauding the illegal and unprovoked US bombing attack on Iran's nuclear facilities.

NATO's Asia-Pacific partners had already come under pressure over defence spending ahead of the summit. At the Shangri-La meeting, held in Singapore on May 30-June 1, US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth told military allies and partners throughout the region to boost military spending and put themselves on a war footing. "The threat China poses is real. And it could be imminent," he declared.

In a war-mongering speech at Chatham House in London on June 9, Rutte had emphasised that NATO had to become a "stronger, more lethal Alliance," prepared to counter

China as well as Russia, and "with every ally contributing their fair share."

Rutte stated, "Russia has teamed up with China, North Korea and Iran.

They are expanding their militaries and their capabilities." China, he declared, was "modernising and expanding its military at breakneck speed." There was therefore no "one theatre" of potential military conflict and the IP4 had a vital role to play in the Indo-Pacific.

At The Hague, Luxon echoed these sentiments. He told media the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions "face many of the same security challenges. That's why it's important New Zealand is at the table at NATO for these critical discussions with like-minded partners."

Inverting reality, Luxon falsely claimed, "We can see the links between the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific in North Korea's support of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and Russia's technical expertise that can help North Korea develop its nuclear program."

In fact, it is US imperialism that has waged three decades of illegal invasions and wars in a desperate bid to maintain its global hegemony. As it escalates its war against Russia in Ukraine and fully backs Israel's barbaric war in Gaza, the Trump administration is plunging headlong towards a conflict with China, which it regards as the chief threat to US global dominance.

In discussions with NATO leaders, Luxon made explicit that he fully supports an escalation of war in the Ukraine against Russia. Luxon earlier announced a fresh \$16 million support package for Ukraine, bringing New Zealand's total financial assistance to over \$133 million. This follows new sanctions targeting Russia. Luxon declared New Zealand stands "in solidarity" with Ukraine, whose "war of self-defence is well into its fourth year and our condemnation of Russia's illegal full-scale invasion remains undiminished."

One lie is piled upon another. While Putin's February 2022 invasion was thoroughly reactionary, it was provoked by the US and NATO powers, which backed the anti-Russian coup in Kiev in 2014, and relentlessly escalated the

war to cement their domination of the Eurasian landmass.

Rutte lauded New Zealand's contribution "from afar" to the war in Ukraine. Some 97 NZ Defence Force personnel are in Europe and the UK training Ukrainian soldiers, and providing intelligence, liaison and logistics support. Luxon claimed that New Zealand's fledgling defence industry could benefit from massively increased European military procurement.

New Zealand, a minor imperialist power, relies on Washington's backing for its own neo-colonial operations in the Pacific. Successive NZ governments have supported US-led wars over the past 30 years, including the criminal invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and endorsed the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza. Luxon has not criticized, let alone condemned, the Trump administration's criminal bombing of Iran.

A highlight of the summit for Luxon was the opportunity he took to meet with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky. "I think he's feeling incredibly supported," Luxon said afterwards. "I think, you know, this is a big win for Ukraine as well" because of the "big investment" that NATO had committed to.

A beaming Luxon posted a friendly photo of the pair on X, absurdly declaring; "New Zealand's support for Ukraine is unwavering. It is support for Ukraine that brings peace to the world and security closer for all nations"—a complete lie.

Speaking to RadioNZ, Luxon insisted that he "wasn't pressured" to increase New Zealand's military spend to 5 percent of GDP. The National Party-led government is however doubling the defence budget from just over 1 to 2 percent, a \$NZ9 billion increase over 4 years. Luxon boasted that a lot of "our partners" at NATO were "incredibly impressed" by the commitment.

New Zealand's entire ruling elite is in lock-step. The opposition Labour Party agrees with doubling military spending while Foreign Minister Winston Peters, leader of the NZ First Party in the coalition, wants it increased even further. The billions required will see sweeping attacks on the social conditions of working people. In the face of widespread popular anti-war sentiment, the vast buildup aims to prepare the military for joint operations with the US and Australia, aimed against China.

Luxon's overseas trip, and the diplomatic maneuvering that accompanied it, underscored the pressures facing New Zealand imperialism amid the ratcheting up of war preparations against the country's most important trading partner. Following the signing of a Free Trade Agreement in 2008, China accounts for nearly one third of all exports, worth \$NZ20.85 billion, mainly primary produce, with imports valued at \$17.4 billion.

Luxon came away from his meetings in Beijing on June

18-20 declaring them successful. Luxon and Premier Li Qiang announced 11 new agreements covering climate change, cultural linkages, tourism and initiatives regarding trade flows. Xi reportedly promised there would be "new progress for our comprehensive strategic partnership in a new decade, and this will certainly better serve our two peoples."

Significantly, before leaving Beijing Luxon found it necessary to distance himself from Rutte's earlier bellicose condemnation of China. Luxon dismissed the claim that China was working with Russia, Iran and North Korea to undermine the West. Saying he "disagreed" with Rutte, Luxon told media, "We've seen bilateral associations, say, between Russia and North Korea, with respect to the war in Ukraine. We've seen bilateral arrangements between Iran and Russia as well, but we haven't seen evidence of a wholesale force"—a reference to China.

New Zealand's corporate media delivered glowing appraisals of Luxon's 12-day trip. Senior political reporter for *The Post*, Thomas Manch, travelling with Luxon, said he had "hit his foreign policy stride." Fran O'Sullivan for the *New Zealand Herald* proclaimed Luxon's "success abroad" and enthused over the coming increased military "interoperability" with NATO.

In reality, New Zealand is involved in an unsustainable balancing act. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded to the summit with a sharply worded statement slamming NATO for "reaching beyond the geographic scope defined in its treaty and into the Asia-Pacific" and demanded the organisation "stop manipulating issues on China."

The statement also noted that NATO countries account for 55 percent of the world's military spending yet are demanding a "more lethal NATO." What exactly, it asked, "is NATO's objective behind this?" In fact, as the summit revealed, 75 years after its founding, the imperialist alliance has set the stage for a catastrophic world war.



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