

FBI opens office in New Zealand

Tom Peters
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During a visit to New Zealand last week, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director Kash Patel opened a new, permanent FBI office attached to the US embassy in Wellington.

The move is directly linked to US imperialism's accelerating preparations for war against China. In a video announcement on July 31, Patel declared that a key purpose of the new FBI office was to work with New Zealand on "countering the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] in the INDOPACOM theatre."

In other words, the FBI's operations are bound up with those of the US Armed Forces Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM), which is building its presence across the vast region and holding provocative military exercises, openly aimed against China.

Driven by its economic crisis, the US ruling class is seeking to assert its hegemony over the world's resources and markets at the expense of its rivals, above all China.

New Zealand's right-wing National Party-led government made no prior announcement of Patel's visit or the new FBI office. The decision to expand the agency's presence in NZ was done in a secretive and anti-democratic manner.

Defence Minister Judith Collins and Foreign Minister Winston Peters both downplayed Patel's reference to "countering" China. Peters told Radio NZ (RNZ) that this was not discussed during his meeting with the FBI director. Collins said the FBI office would play an active role across the Pacific region in opposing drug trafficking, gun running and "interference in countries' systems."

The government's evasiveness reflects its nervousness about the widespread hostility among working people to the fascist Trump administration, which is escalating the genocide in Gaza, threatening all-out war against Iran and continuing the bloody proxy war against Russia over Ukraine.

Sections of big business in New Zealand are concerned about deteriorating relations with China, NZ's number one trading partner. In a statement responding to Patel, the Chinese Embassy in Wellington said: "we strongly oppose any attempt to make groundless assertions or vilification against China out of the Cold War mentality."

New Zealand is a minor imperialist power which, since World War II, has relied on its alliance with the US to uphold its predatory interests, including NZ dominance over small island nations in the southwest Pacific.

The new FBI office will build on the already extensive intelligence ties between New Zealand and the US. As part of the Five Eyes—the intelligence-sharing network that includes the US, UK, Australia and Canada—New Zealand's spy agencies routinely share information with the US National Security Agency, including private communications intercepted by the Waihopai spy base.

The FBI will assist with surveillance and the suppression of democratic rights in New Zealand and the Pacific. Over the past century the FBI has spied on, infiltrated and disrupted anti-war, Civil Rights, left-wing and socialist organisations, including the Trotskyist movement. In 1941, the FBI raided the offices of the Socialist Workers Party, which was followed by the prosecution of 29 of its leading members, 18 of whom were imprisoned because of their socialist opposition to the war.

The agency now has 38,000 agents and a budget of more than \$US10 billion. It is under the control of an extreme right-wing, authoritarian administration. Patel is a fascist who was appointed to lead the FBI because of his absolute loyalty to Trump: he supported Trump's January 6, 2021 attempted coup to overthrow the election of Joe Biden.

The FBI is playing an integral role alongside ICE

(Immigration and Customs Enforcement) in the brutal mass detention and deportation of immigrants, and in the persecution of opponents of the Gaza genocide.

New Zealand's opposition Labour Party made clear that it supports the new FBI office in Wellington. Its leader Chris Hipkins merely told RNZ that it had come as a "surprise" and that "the general public are going to be wanting to know what the rationale is for this." Labour also supports the National government's move to double military spending to strengthen the alliance with the US, and legislation to crack down on domestic opposition in the name of stopping "foreign interference."

The Green Party's intelligence spokesperson Teanau Tuiono said the FBI office "flies in the face of our independent foreign policy." He called for New Zealand to exit the Five Eyes and said, "with the chaotic nature of the Trump regime, more and more people around the world are looking to build alliances in other ways."

The Greens, however, were part of the Labour-led coalition government from 2017-2023, which strengthened the alliance with the US and boosted New Zealand's role in the militarisation of the Pacific.

Te Pūti Mōri (TPM), another Labour ally in parliament, has launched a petition demanding an end to the FBI's operations in Wellington and a "guarantee that no foreign law enforcement agency will operate in Aotearoa [New Zealand] without public debate, legal scrutiny, and Te Tiriti-based consultation."

This means that such agencies should be allowed to operate if approved by the indigenous capitalist elite that TPM speaks for, in accordance with the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi (Te Tiriti). The treaty, signed in 1840 between the British Empire and hundreds of Mōri tribal leaders, facilitated the colonisation of New Zealand.

Meanwhile, "liberal" media commentators welcomed the FBI's new office. RNZ political reporter Anneke Smith said on August 5 that there was "real concern" about Patel's close ties with Trump and his far-right positions. But despite this, she declared that the FBI would do "really important work" with New Zealand in tackling crime across the Pacific, which "can only be a good thing."

The pro-Labour Party *Daily Blog* endorsed Patel's statement that the FBI office was needed to "counter"

China. While admitting that the FBI would use the office to "keep tabs on NZ politics," editor Martyn Bradbury declared that "we have no options but to grant access to the FBI in the hope they can counter the Cartels and the Chinese Shadow Banking infrastructure," which he alleged was financing crime in the Pacific.

Bradbury stated that China was "encroaching into our sphere of influence" in the Pacific, referring to a recent economic agreement between Beijing and the Cook Islands, a semi-colony of New Zealand.

The *Daily Blog* has echoed the CIA's anti-China propaganda and repeatedly attacked the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Group (SEG) for opposing the build-up to war against China. Bradbury has demanded that the New Zealand intelligence agencies investigate the SEG as "Chinese enablers and for possible treason."

Bradbury's embrace of the FBI is in keeping with the *Daily Blog*'s pro-imperialist politics and contempt for basic democratic rights. The blog supports the vast expansion in military spending and recently argued for the return of compulsory military service.

New Zealand's ever-closer alliance with the US, as it charges towards a catastrophic war against China, underscores the urgent need for a unified international movement of the working class against war based on socialist principles. Workers and youth must break from Labour and its middle class allies, including the union bureaucracy, and join the Socialist Equality Group in its fight to end the capitalist system, which is the source of militarism and war.



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