

# Crisis in New Zealand government over Iran war

Tom Peters  
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Divisions have emerged in New Zealand's right-wing coalition government about how overtly to align with the criminal US-Israeli war against Iran.

On April 29, according to the *New Zealand Herald*, "Prime Minister Christopher Luxon held crisis talks with Foreign Minister Winston Peters" after Peters' office released emails to the newspaper that were sent in early March between the two ministers' offices. The correspondence revealed that Luxon pushed for "more explicit public support" of the US and Israeli bombing, which had already killed hundreds of civilians, including schoolchildren.

While Peters apologised for releasing the emails, calling it a mistake, it was clearly a deliberate move to embarrass Luxon. With an election approaching in November and mass popular opposition to the war, Peters' right-wing nationalist NZ First Party is pretending that it never supported the attack on Iran and is seeking to distance itself from Luxon's conservative National Party.

On March 1, Luxon and Peters released a joint statement effectively endorsing the unprovoked war of aggression that had commenced the previous day. It echoed the Trump administration's propaganda, saying: "We acknowledge that the actions taken overnight by the US and Israel were designed to prevent Iran from continuing to threaten international peace and security." The statement condemned "in the strongest terms" Iran's defensive retaliatory strikes targeting US bases in the Middle East.

Luxon apparently believed the statement had not gone far enough. According to the *Herald*, Luxon's staff suggested to Peters that "Luxon's talking points be updated to align with a statement from Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese," whose Labor government was among the most fervent supporters of

the US and Israel's actions.

A staff member in Peters' office replied that the foreign minister disagreed with "the PM's preference for more explicit public support of the US' action." Another email from Peters' office stated: "Overtly supporting the US position will expose even further the position put to the PM this morning on [Radio NZ's] *Morning Report* about the legality of the action."

Luxon had told Radio NZ (RNZ) on March 2 that the US and Israel attacked Iran because its regime was "evil." Asked whether the war breached international law, Luxon refused to answer, saying: "That is something for the Americans and the Israelis to explain."

A spokesperson for Luxon told the *Herald* that the emails "mischaracterise the PM's position" and that Luxon had merely "sought to test New Zealand's position against that of Canada and Australia." The spokesperson said Peters "clearly put politics ahead of the national interest" by releasing the emails.

While Peters and Luxon disagreed about what language Luxon should use, there were never any real differences over the war, which NZ First, National and the far-right ACT Party all support.

Amid overwhelming anti-war sentiment in the working class, however, the coalition has verbally distanced itself from Washington. The war is driving up the cost of petrol, food and other essentials, causing hardship for millions of people.

An Ipsos poll taken in April found, according to the *Herald*, that 87 percent of people "agreed that New Zealand should avoid direct military involvement." It also found that 75 percent believed that the US would have a negative influence on world affairs over the next decade.

Following a visit to Washington in early April, Peters

tried to rewrite history, telling RNZ that the government had “never expressed support for the war.” At the same time, he refused to condemn Trump’s genocidal threats to destroy Iran’s entire civilisation.

Luxon told *Stuff* on May 5: “We are exhorting both parties to get to de-escalation... The longer this conflict goes on, the worse it is for all of us here at home, but also all around the world.”

Deputy prime minister and ACT leader David Seymour—who celebrated the war on March 2, saying that “an axis of evil is falling” in Iran and Venezuela—has also sought to backpedal. Asked by the *Herald* on May 1 if he supported the war, Seymour said: “No. Even the people who started it and who are engaged in it are trying to find an off-ramp.”

In fact, the onslaught against the Iranian people continues, while Israel wages a brutal war of extermination in Lebanon and continues its ethnic cleansing of Palestine. These are fronts in a developing Third World War, in which US imperialism is seeking to seize markets and resources and redivide the globe at the expense of Russia and China.

New Zealand, a close ally of the US, is already involved. In 2024, the Luxon government sent military personnel to the Middle East to assist in the bombing of Yemen, to protect supply lines for Israel’s war machine. The government has said it will consider a US request made this month to help it establish control over the Strait of Hormuz.

The opposition Labour Party and the Greens reacted to Peters’ release of emails by hailing the right-wing NZ First leader and lending credence to his phony anti-war stance.

Labour Party leader Chris Hipkins told the Bradbury Group podcast on May 5 that Luxon “wanted to go in and support an illegal war” and “Winston Peters seemed to be the only one who had a bit of common sense here in saying: ‘Hang on a minute, this isn’t such a good idea.’”

Green Party co-leader Chlöe Swarbrick told the *Herald* on May 6: “Thank God for Winston Peters, in this specific instance here, saying to the prime minister: ‘*Taihoa* [wait], this is not what the country needs.’”

These statements falsify Peters’ position, which was to repeat the US-Israeli justifications for the war, while refusing to condemn the mass murder of people in Iran, Lebanon and Gaza. NZ First has spent two-and-a-half

years smearing opponents of the Gaza genocide as anti-semitic and criminal, while railing against Marxism and demonising immigrants, Māori and LGBT people.

Labour and the Greens calculate that they may need NZ First’s support to form a coalition government after the election, as they did in 2017. Peters was the foreign minister and deputy prime minister in Jacinda Ardern’s government from 2017 to 2020.

The Labour-led coalition strengthened ties with US imperialism, including by sending NZ troops to Britain to help train Ukrainian conscripts for the war against Russia over Ukraine. In 2023, Labour backed Israel’s genocidal assault on Gaza.

While Labour has criticised the Iran war, it fully supports the current government’s move to double military spending and further integrate New Zealand into US and Australian preparations for war against China.

None of the capitalist parties offers any alternative to war. The urgent task facing the working class is to build an international socialist movement, to put an end to the capitalist and imperialist system that is plunging the world into war and barbarism.



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