Former New Zealand defence minister says World War III is underway

Tom Peters
1 September 2026

In a chilling statement indicative of the discussions taking place in ruling circles in New Zealand and internationally, the country's former Defence Minister Ron Mark declared on August 31: "In my view, we've been in World War III for quite a long time now."

Speaking on the *New Zealand Herald*'s daily podcast, Mark said the war was "not just centred around Ukraine. It's centred around Iran, it's centred around North Korea, it's centred around China, and it's centred around Russia, and their overall imperialistic aims and what it is they seek to achieve."

He continued: "The sad thing is that there are those people who wish to pretend it's not happening, those who don't want to say it's happening. And that leaves us in a very difficult situation, because we're not even mentally prepared to start arming ourselves, equipping ourselves, and preparing ourselves for what's going to come, and the consequences of the hit it will make on our economy and our supply chain."

Mark is a member of the right-wing nationalist NZ First Party, which plays a major role in the current coalition government led by the National Party; its leader Winston Peters is the Foreign Minister.

Mark is standing as a candidate in the November 7 election and has declared he wants to return to the job of defence minister. He held the position during the 2017-2020 Labour Party-led coalition government, which strengthened NZ's alliance with US imperialism.

Mark's call for the country to prepare for war points to what the entire political establishment, including the opposition Labour Party, are actively discussing behind closed doors.

As he noted, most politicians "don't want to say" publicly that this is a Third World War, but that is what is unfolding. Driven by the historic crisis of capitalism, the US ruling class is leading the drive to redivide the world, conquer new markets and resources, and reimpose colonial slavery on billions of people.

The four enemy countries listed by Mark—China, Russia, Iran and North Korea—are the same ones identified by the Trump administration, which has labelled them an "Axis of Autocracy."

His statement that these four countries have "imperialistic aims" turns reality on its head. The US has launched or is playing a leading role in imperialist wars on nearly every continent, including the criminal attack on Venezuela and looting of its oil, the unprovoked war of aggression against Iran, the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza, the US-NATO war against Russia over Ukraine, and the far-advanced war preparations against China.

China is viewed as the main obstacle to US global dominance. For more than a decade-and-a-half it has been the target of US economic war, military encirclement and provocations —including the US arming of Taiwan and strengthened military alliances with the Philippines, Japan, South Korea and Australia.

The attacks on Venezuela and Iran are intended to cut off the supply of oil and other resources to China.

The escalating war against Russia is also aimed at isolating and preparing for a direct attack against China—as well as placing the resources of Ukraine and Russia itself under the control of the US and European imperialists. Putin's invasion of Ukraine was a reactionary and disastrous response provoked by the relentless expansion of NATO, which flooded Ukraine with weapons following an anti-Russian coup d'état in 2014.

New Zealand is deeply integrated into US wars and war plans. In 2022 the then Labour-Greens government sent about 100 troops to Britain to assist in training

© World Socialist Web Site

Ukrainian conscripts for the war against Russia.

In 2024, the current government sent military personnel to the Middle East to assist in the US-led bombing of Yemen, in order to keep supply lines open for Israel's war machine.

As a member of the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing network, New Zealand's spy agencies are active in US-led global surveillance and war planning against China.

Mark's comments, however, reflect nervousness in New Zealand's ruling class about widespread opposition to war, as seen in protests against the Gaza genocide and the Iran war.

A poll of 2,300 people taken in January and February by the Asia New Zealand Foundation found that only 39 percent of the population viewed the US as a friend, while 35 percent viewed it as a threat. Respondents had a more favourable view of China: 43 percent saw ?China as a friend and 23 percent saw it as a threat.

This is what Mark has in mind when he says the country is not "mentally prepared to start arming ourselves, equipping ourselves and preparing for what's to come."

NZ First is leading the charge in seeking to condition the public for war. Its leader Peters has made repeated racist outbursts against Chinese people, and the party is calling for recent migrants, many of them from China, to be stripped of the right to vote. NZ First has also called for bringing back compulsory military service.

In the Pacific region, Peters is hectoring and bullying impoverished island nations to fall into line with the US military build-up against China.

Mark is also agitating for a more open role in the war against Russia, and has glorified New Zealanders who are fighting in Ukraine's International Legion.

All the capitalist parties, however, are complicit in promoting militarism and war. None of them, including the opposition Labour, the Greens and Te P?ti M?ori have responded to Mark's inflammatory comments about the need to prepare for World War Three.

Labour agrees with the National-led government that military spending must be doubled, at least, to 2 percent of GDP, and recruitment must be boosted dramatically. Labour recently expressed agreement with extending the deployment of NZ troops in Britain to train more cannon fodder for the Ukrainian military.

No members of parliament, nor any of the middle class pseudo-left groups that promote Labour and the Greens, have spoken out against the Zelensky regime's persecution of anti-war and left-wing groups. They are all silent on the recent decision by a Ukrainian court to sentence socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk to 15 years in prison for writing articles that called on Russian and Ukrainian workers to unite to end the war.

The Green Party is engaged in its own provocative militarist campaign. Its candidate Josh Jacobsen, a former NZSAS commando, has sought to whitewash New Zealand's role in the imperialist war in Afghanistan.

The Greens worked closely with NZ First during the 2017-2020 coalition government. Green co-leader James Shaw co-wrote a report with Mark in 2019 that justified a major increase in military spending.

An anti-war movement can only be built in opposition to all these capitalist parties. It must be based on a socialist and internationalist program, aimed at uniting workers of all countries to put an end to the capitalist system that is plunging the world into barbarism. Workers and young people in New Zealand who want to join this fight should contact the Socialist Equality Group.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site