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At NATO summit, New Zealand PM backs war with Russia, military build-up against China

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern was among the leaders from the Asia-Pacific region—along with those of Australia, Japan and South Korea—who were invited to attend the NATO war-planning summit this week in Madrid, Spain.



New Zealand PM Jacinda Ardern at NATO meeting, with Australian PM Anthony Albanese (right foreground) [Image: Jacinda Ardern Facebook]

Ardern is the first New Zealand leader to take part in a summit of the alliance. Her presence points to the increasing integration of the country into both the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, and the US-led plans for war against China.

The 30 members of NATO, including the United States, Canada, and most European states, adopted a new strategy document outlining plans to militarise Europe and to develop the capacity for “warfighting against nuclear-armed peer competitors.” In addition to denouncing Russia as a “threat” and demanding an escalation of the war against it, NATO also targeted China. The document asserts that China’s economic development (expressed as “control”) conflicts with the “interests” of NATO members.

The imperialist powers, led by Washington, are responding to the historic crisis of capitalism by ramping up the exploitation of the working class at home, and through the use of military force to redivide the world. As was the case in World Wars I and II, minor powers such as New Zealand and Australia are rushing to secure their seat at the table for the carve-up.

In her statement to the NATO summit, Ardern touted New Zealand’s expanding contributions to the war in Ukraine. This includes “training Ukrainian troops and supporting intelligence efforts,” and providing other “military and non-military aid,” in addition to joining the sanctions against Russia.

She regurgitated NATO’s false version of the conflict, describing it as “Russia versus all those who hold a basic sense of humanity and chose to act on it.” In fact, Putin’s invasion of Ukraine was a reactionary and disastrous response to years of military encirclement and provocations by NATO, including the 2014 fascist-led and US-backed coup that ousted a pro-Russian government in Kiev. The Russian invasion has been seized upon by the imperialist powers as a long-awaited pretext for massive rearmament and war against Russia.

Ardern’s speech had an unreal quality, as she sought to cloak NATO’s war with pacifist phrases, calling for countries to focus on “de-escalation, peace and stability.”

Even as NATO openly discusses the need to plan for nuclear war, and the US alone spends \$80,000 per minute on building up its nuclear arsenal, Ardern declared that countries must “not allow the legacy of the war in Ukraine to become an arms race, or an even more polarised and dangerous world.” She asked NATO members to “send a strong message” by committing to nuclear disarmament.

Ardern also sought to cover-up the increasingly anti-democratic and fascistic forms of rule, which are being adopted across Europe as the continent is placed on a war footing. In a joint press release, Ardern and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez announced a “Global Values Partnership,” based on their commitment to “vibrant and resilient democracy,” “diversity,” “human rights” and even “internationalist values.”

This staggeringly hypocritical statement was issued just four days after Sánchez defended the massacre of at least 37 migrants by Spanish and Moroccan forces at the border of the Spanish enclave of Melilla.

Significantly, Ardern also hinted at attacks on democratic rights in NZ, telling the NATO summit that “even New Zealand is targeted by Russian mis- and disinformation.” This is a thinly veiled threat that any opposition to war will be treated as enemy propaganda to be suppressed, as the New Zealand ruling class did during World Wars I and II.

In addition to denouncing Russia, Ardern lined up firmly with NATO’s pivot against China, stating that “China has in recent times also become more assertive and more willing to challenge international rules and norms.” She referred to “attempts to disrupt and destabilise” the Indo-Pacific region, and warned against “militarisation.” The US, Australia and New Zealand, which are all colonial powers in the Pacific, have denounced China’s activities in the region, including its recent security agreement with the Solomon Islands.

The Chinese embassy in Wellington issued a statement on June 30 hitting back at Ardern, saying her comments were “wrong” and “not helpful for deepening mutual trust between [China and New Zealand], or for the efforts made by the two countries to keep our bilateral relations on the right track.” The embassy said that China’s actions in the Pacific had nothing to do with “militarization,” and that “if militarization does exist in the South Pacific, it is clear to all who and what is fuelling such tensions”—a clear reference to the US and its allies.

The Labour Party-led government has sought to maintain a balance between New Zealand’s military-intelligence alliance with the US, on the one hand, and increasing economic reliance on trade with China. Since 2018, the share of New Zealand’s exports (by value) going to China has increased from 23 to 30 percent.

Ardern's participation in the NATO gathering marks a definite escalation in New Zealand's support for confrontation with China. Ardern this week signed a new free trade agreement with the European Union, aimed in part at shifting New Zealand's trade away from China. Her visit to Europe follows recent meetings with US president Joe Biden, Australian prime minister Anthony Albanese and Japan's Fumio Kishida—all of which were aimed at strengthening military and intelligence ties.

Significantly, the far-right ACT Party issued a statement welcoming Ardern's comments at the NATO summit. It called for the New Zealand parliament to go further by declaring that China is engaged in "genocide" against the Uyghurs—a fabricated charge which is part of Washington's effort to build a "humanitarian" case for war.

The pro-Labour Party *Daily Blog* similarly applauded Ardern, with editor Martyn Bradbury writing: "I agree with every word from the PM." He warned that China could retaliate by slashing trade, and concluded: "We are part of the great game now." The nationalist blog has repeatedly called for greater military spending and urged the intelligence agencies to investigate the Socialist Equality Group for "possible treason" for opposing anti-China war propaganda.

Conscious of widespread anti-war sentiment in New Zealand, the Green Party sought to distance itself from Ardern's open embrace of NATO. Green foreign affairs spokesperson Golriz Ghahraman told Newshub that New Zealand should "stand as an independent, principled voice on the world stage" and expressed concern that "with the war in Ukraine, we're kind of going back into those old Cold War allegiances, rather than focusing on Asia-Pacific."

The Greens, however, are an integral part of the Labour-led coalition government. Ghahraman made clear that the party has no principled opposition to NATO's war with Russia. She merely said that New Zealand's "response to the Ukraine war has been more militarised than the Green Party would have liked it to be," and called for more "humanitarian" aid. Ghahraman's reference to the Asia-Pacific, moreover, underscores the fact that the party supports New Zealand's neo-colonial activities in the region, which are bound up with the US-led confrontation against China.

The Ardern government has dragged New Zealand into the US-NATO war against Russia, and far-advanced plans for war with China, which threaten to rapidly transform into a third world war involving nuclear-armed adversaries. This looming catastrophe can only be stopped through the construction of an anti-war movement led by the international working class, armed with a socialist program to put an end to capitalism, which is the source of war.

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