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New Zealand's far-right government seeks stronger alliance with US imperialism

In a speech to the United States Business Summit in Auckland last Thursday, New Zealand's new foreign minister, Winston Peters, pledged that the government will strengthen military and strategic ties with Washington, which is militarising the Indo-Pacific region in preparation for war against China.



New Zealand First leader Winston Peters addressing a public meeting in Ōpōtiki. [Photo: Twitter/X @winstonpeters]

It was the first major public speech delivered by any minister since the National Party-led coalition was formed on November 24. Peters, who is also the deputy prime minister, leads the right-wing nationalist New Zealand First Party, which is notorious for anti-immigrant and anti-Chinese demagoguery. The party is widely despised and only got 6 percent in the October election, but it and the libertarian ACT Party (which got 8.6 percent) have been given extraordinary power in the coalition government.

Peters has emerged as the most prominent figure in the government, setting its foreign policy agenda and sidelining National's prime minister Christopher Luxon. The latter also spoke at the US Business Summit, calling for more trade and investment, but his remarks received relatively little media coverage.

In his speech, Peters said the government would move with "speed and intensity" to "strengthen engagement with the US on strategic and security challenges, centred on our common interest in a stable, peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific."

He repeatedly referred to New Zealand's "shared values" with the US, saying: "Our institutions are founded on democratic values, respect for human rights, freedom of speech and assembly, and free and fair trade. Promoting and maintaining the rule of law is the defining feature of both of our political systems."

The reality is that as a minor imperialist power in the Pacific region, New Zealand has relied since World War II on a de facto alliance with Washington to further its own predatory interests, which have nothing to do with democracy or human rights.

New Zealand has joined the criminal US-led wars in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. The country is also a member of the US-led Five Eyes intelligence-sharing network along with Britain, Canada and Australia. There are currently New Zealand troops in Britain training Ukrainian conscripts for the US-NATO proxy war against Russia, which is the opening stage of a Third World War for the US and its allies to re-divide the world and plunder its resources at the expense of Russia and China.

The real "shared values" of the US and its allies, including the New Zealand government, are on display in their support for Israel's genocide in Gaza. More than 15,000 Palestinians, including 6,000 children, have been killed by Israel's indiscriminate bombing and siege of the Gaza Strip, and millions have been made homeless. Luxon and his predecessor, Chris Hipkins, have both justified Israel's mass slaughter as "self defence," echoing the Biden administration.

The destruction of Gaza shows what the imperialist powers are planning more broadly, as they stoke the war against Russia and threaten war against Iran and China.

In August, then Labour defence minister Andrew Little stated that New Zealand "may be called on to play a role should conflict break out" in the South China Sea, i.e. between the US and China, two nuclear-armed powers. Labour, National, NZ First and ACT all agree that military spending must sharply increase from about 1.4 to 2 percent of gross domestic product. This will be paid for with savage funding cuts to social programs on which working people rely.

According to the *New Zealand Herald*, Peters' speech repeated the language of the Labour government's 2023 Defence Policy Review, warning about the "threat" posed by "the entry of undemocratic, unfriendly countries into the Pacific region," referring to China.

Peters also referred to his speech delivered in 2018 as foreign minister in the Labour-led government, which called for a stronger US military presence in the Pacific. He said he "welcomed the increased US security commitment" over the past five years, amid "intensified geostrategic competition in our region, and increasing threats to Pacific peoples' peace and prosperity."

In fact, the US poses the main threat to peace in the Indo-Pacific region with its provocations and open preparations for war against China. Washington has funnelled billions of dollars worth of military equipment to Taiwan and strengthened military ties with the Philippines, Japan, South Korea and Australia.

Peters told the summit that he and the National Party's defence minister, Judith Collins, had discussed joining the AUKUS security pact between Australia, the UK and US. "It's something in which the Australians will look acutely at us... to see if we're going to step up. We've got to do more and pay more to be respected. I'm sorry but it's the least they can expect of us," the foreign minister said.

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AUKUS includes an agreement for Australia to acquire nuclear-powered attack submarines and hypersonic missiles, and to share military technology to strengthen interoperability. The Biden administration views the agreement as critical to defeating China.

The previous Labour government would not commit to taking part in AUKUS, despite pressure from Canberra and Washington. Hipkins indicated that New Zealand's legislation banning nuclear-powered vessels from its waters would be an obstacle to joining the agreement, but said New Zealand might join a so-called second pillar of AUKUS relating to sharing military technology.

New Zealand's ruling class, which depends heavily on trade with China—the biggest market for NZ's dairy products, the country's main export—has been reluctant to openly

join the US-led confrontation with Beijing. Every section of the political establishment, however, supports the alliance with the US and is determined to secure a seat at the table in the carve-up of Russia and China.

The decisive role of the US alliance was underscored following New Zealand's inconclusive September 2017 election. Then US ambassador Scott Brown publicly indicated that Washington wanted the next government to take a stronger stance against China and criticised the incumbent National Party over its perceived hesitancy to join Donald Trump's belligerent threats against North Korea. At the same time, National was relentlessly attacked by pro-US academics and media pundits for its business ties with China.

Following Brown's statements, NZ First formed a coalition government with Labour instead of National. From 2017-2020 Winston Peters played a key role as foreign minister. The Labour-NZ First government, which also included the Greens, issued numerous statements characterising China and Russia as "threats" to the global "rules-based order" dominated by the US.

Peters' speech last week and the central role given to NZ First in the new National-led government is intended to send a clear message that New Zealand will "pull its weight," in Peters' words, as the Biden administration accelerates the charge towards world war.

The only way to stop such a catastrophe is through the mobilisation of the international working class, in opposition to all the parliamentary parties, on the basis of a revolutionary socialist program to put an end to capitalism, which is the source of imperialist war.

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