

New Zealand government calls for greater US military presence in the Pacific

By Tom Peters
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During a recent visit to Washington, New Zealand Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters signalled a further escalation in the Labour Party-led coalition government's alignment with the Trump administration's economic war and military preparations against China.

Peters is also Foreign Minister and leader of the NZ First Party, a right-wing nationalist, anti-Asian party. Despite receiving just over 7 percent of the votes in the 2017 election, NZ First was given several ministerial roles by Labour Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and plays a major role in determining the government's foreign and military policy.

Peters met with senior members of the Trump administration, including Vice-President Mike Pence, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats and National Security Adviser John Bolton.

Peters also delivered a major speech at Georgetown University on December 15, calling for a stronger US-New Zealand alliance in the Pacific. He declared that the South West Pacific was “becoming more contested and its security... ever more fragile.” He called on the US “to engage more” in the region, adding, “we think it is in your vital interests to do so, and time is of the essence.”

Clearly referring to China, Peters noted that “larger players are renewing their interest in the Pacific with an attendant element of strategic competition. The speed and intensity of those interests at play are of great concern to us.” He also pointed to the supposed “threat” posed by North Korea and by “militarised” islands in the South China Sea, which “challenge international law and norms.”

China's territorial disputes with neighbouring countries in the South China Sea have been seized on

by the Obama and Trump administrations as the pretext for a vast US military build-up in the region.

In an attempt to reverse its long-term economic decline, the US ruling elite is preparing for war against China, which it views as the main obstacle to its global hegemony. Washington is demanding unwavering support from all its allies, including Australia and New Zealand.

Despite New Zealand's economic reliance on China, its largest trading partner, the Labour-NZ First government, which also includes the Green Party, has significantly strengthened New Zealand's alliance with US imperialism. The government has redeployed troops to Iraq and Afghanistan and sent air force personnel to Japan to join the encirclement of North Korea. Most significantly, this year's Defence Strategic Policy Statement echoed the Pentagon in labelling Russia and China the main “threats” to global stability.

In his Washington speech, Peters praised the historic collaboration of New Zealand with US imperialism in the Pacific, which he called a “vast canvas for the United States' emergence as a global power in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.” He listed the US colonies of American Samoa, Palau, Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, the Northern Marianas and Guam—some of which host important US military facilities and were the site of bloody battles in World War II.

Peters also mentioned New Zealand's colonies Niue, the Cook Islands and Tokelau. For more than a century, NZ's ruling class has relied on its major imperialist allies, Britain and the US, to support its own colonial ambitions in the Pacific.

The Deputy Prime Minister pointed out that since World War II “New Zealand has regularly answered the call when the United States has mobilised its

friends in defence of its interests and international security more broadly.” Successive NZ governments have supported one US war after another, including in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Labour-NZ First government, Peters said, had a “sense of urgency about Pacific risks” and recently purchased four new maritime surveillance aircraft “to do our share to promote regional security.” He praised US “military cooperation,” including “maritime security” and “support for training and equipment for Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Tonga.”

Peters’ call for further militarisation comes amid an intensifying anti-Chinese campaign in New Zealand, aimed at overcoming widespread anti-war sentiment and hostility to the Trump administration.

A central figure in the campaign is academic Anne-Marie Brady, who has denounced political donations by Chinese-born businessmen and demanded that New Zealand’s intelligence agencies monitor Chinese people involved in politics, business, universities, media and cultural organisations.

Without any evidence, Brady has accused Jian Yang, a Chinese-born MP in the opposition National Party, of being a Chinese Communist Party “agent,” a claim echoed by NZ First.

Brady has been promoted in the media as an independent “China expert”. One Fairfax Media columnist labelled her “New Zealander of the Year.” She is also backed by the *Daily Blog*, a nationalist publication funded by three trade unions.

Brady has received funding for her research from the Washington DC-based Wilson Center and the NATO military alliance and is supported by US Democratic and Republican politicians. In May, former US presidential candidate Hillary Clinton praised Brady for drawing attention to the “new global battle” against Chinese influence.

Visiting New Zealand this month, US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs, Randall G. Schriver, revealed that he personally knew Brady and had spoken to her about “Chinese influence operations.” He told the media on December 11 that the Trump administration was ready to “collaborate” with NZ intelligence agencies in an investigation along the lines suggested by Brady.

Following Schriver’s and Peters’ statements, New Zealand’s spy agency, the Government

Communications Security Bureau (GCSB), joined its US and UK counterparts in publicly accusing Beijing of carrying out a “global campaign” to steal intellectual property and commercial data, including from organisations in New Zealand. The agency provided no evidence for these claims.

Whistleblower Edward Snowden revealed in 2015 that the GCSB spies on China as part of the US-led Five Eyes intelligence network.

New Zealand’s integration into US war plans and provocations against China demolishes the claims by pseudo-left groups and trade unions that the Labour-NZ First-Greens government represented a shift to the left. In fact, the coalition was formed in October 2017, following the intervention of US Ambassador Scott Brown, who signalled that Washington wanted the new government to take a harder line against China.

With the anti-Chinese NZ First playing a central role, the Ardern government has ramped up the ruling elite’s agenda of austerity, nationalism and militarism, and is dragging the country into a potentially catastrophic confrontation between nuclear-armed powers.

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