

Chinese Premier Li visits New Zealand to counter US war drive

Tom Peters
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Chinese Premier Li Qiang visited New Zealand this week, ahead of visits to Australia and Malaysia, as part of the Chinese government's attempts to counter the far-advanced war preparations against it, led by the United States. Even as the US and its allies escalate their proxy war against Russia over Ukraine, risking nuclear war, and support Israel's genocide in Gaza, Washington continues to militarise the Indo-Pacific and is seeking to goad China into an attack on Taiwan, to provide the pretext for war.

Li's visit to New Zealand was the first by a Chinese premier since 2017. He held talks with Prime Minister Christopher Luxon and business leaders, highlighting New Zealand's heavy dependence on trade with China, which took about 27 percent of NZ's exports last year.

Victoria University of Wellington political analyst Geoffrey Miller wrote that Li's aim was to remind Luxon "just how important China is to New Zealand" and to warn the government: "don't put it all at risk" by aligning too closely with the US.

New Zealand is an imperialist ally of the US and part of the US-led Five Eyes intelligence network. Successive governments have participated in the criminal wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the previous Labour government sent troops to Britain to assist in training Ukrainian conscripts for the US-NATO proxy war against Russia. Both Labour and the current National Party-led government have issued statements identifying Russia and China as the main strategic "threats" facing the world.

Whether by coincidence or not, Foreign Minister Winston Peters, from the virulently anti-Chinese New Zealand First Party, was outside the country when Li visited Wellington (Peters was on an official trip to East Timor). Peters is leading the push for New Zealand to join the second "pillar" of the AUKUS

(Australia-UK-US) pact, aimed at further boosting military cooperation.

On Thursday, Luxon said he and Li "discussed our significant economic relationship, which benefits people in both countries with two-way trade in goods worth nearly \$38 billion." They signed agreements on boosting trade and business ties. Li told the media: "China is ready to be part of New Zealand's endeavour to double the value of [its] exports in the next decade."

Luxon told the media, however, that the two leaders spent half of their discussion on areas of disagreement, including allegations that China carried out a cyber attack on New Zealand's parliament in 2021—which Beijing denies. He said Li had expressed China's firm opposition to AUKUS. In his public comments, Li warned that differences between the two countries "should not become a chasm that blocks exchanges and cooperation."

Meanwhile, sections of the New Zealand media and political establishment are stepping up their efforts to promote a more openly anti-China posture.

Media organisation *Stuff* timed the release of an online documentary on "Chinese interference" to coincide with Li's visit. The documentary "The Long Game" is largely based on allegations by pro-Washington academic Anne-Marie Brady—who has received NATO funding and whose work has been praised by former US secretary of state Hillary Clinton.

In 2017 Brady accused members of the Labour and National parties of being Chinese spies, without any evidence. She also accused almost all Chinese organisations in NZ—including cultural organisations, language training centres, student groups, academics with links to China, and media outlets—of being tools of the Chinese Communist Party and called for them to be placed under surveillance.

Stuff's documentary also revives Brady's allegation that a car crash in New Zealand in July 2020, which killed two Chinese dissidents, was the result of "sabotage"—despite a Coroner finding that it was caused by a head-on collision. The driver of the other vehicle involved was found guilty of careless driving causing death.

The documentary also airs allegations, which date back roughly 20 years, that Chinese agents carried out a kidnapping and an attempted kidnapping of two dissidents in New Zealand.

"The Long Game" features interviews with former Labour Party defence minister Andrew Little, who says Chinese interference "is a real threat... and it is probably growing." Last August, Little declared that New Zealand's military needed more funding in case it is "called on" to join a war in the South China Sea.

The Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC), co-chaired in New Zealand by National Party MP Joseph Mooney and Labour MP Ingrid Leary, has called for an inquiry into the documentary's allegations. IPAC is a network of politicians from 27 legislatures—led by the US and its imperialist allies—whose "campaigns are designed to enable a coordinated response to challenges associated with Beijing's recent behaviour," according to its website.

IPAC's Australian co-chair, Senator James Paterson, says in "The Long Game" that China "is a more severe foreign intelligence foe than any other we have ever faced... This is the most dangerous strategic environment since World War II."

While the media dials up the anti-China hysteria, New Zealand's National Party-led coalition government is continuing to strengthen its participation in military exercises aimed at threatening and provoking China.

Reuters reported last month that Australia, Britain, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore "agreed to stage more complex military drills in the region this year involving drones, fifth-generation fighter planes and surveillance aircraft" as part of the Five Power Defence Arrangement.

Pro-Palestine groups are opposing the New Zealand navy's participation in the RIMPAC exercise, which begins on June 26. The US-led exercise will involve 25,000 troops from 29 militaries, including Israeli forces.

Defence Minister Judith Collins said New Zealand had to be involved in order to strengthen "interoperability" with its allies. Announcing a major increase in military spending in last month's budget, Collins declared that the world was "increasingly unstable" and there would be more military deployments in future.

As well as continuing to train Ukrainian forces, the Luxon government has sent military personnel to the Middle East to assist with the US-led bombing of Yemen, in order to defend supply routes for Israel's war machine. In addition, Collins announced this month that another 41 troops will be sent to the Korean Demilitarised Zone, to join 11 already there as part of the United Nations forces.

New Zealand is deepening its involvement on three fronts of what is developing into a global conflict. The aim of the US is to counter its economic decline through the redivision of the world, at the expense of Russia, North Korea, Iran and its proxies, and especially China, which is Washington's main economic rival.

Notwithstanding its economic ties with China, New Zealand's ruling class is determined to keep its seat at the imperialist table, in order to benefit from the coming war. Despite some verbal denunciations of the Gaza genocide, from Labour and its allies, the Greens and Te Pahi Māori, none of the parties in parliament represents an anti-war tendency. Only a unified struggle against the capitalist system, uniting workers internationally on the basis of a socialist program, can put an end to imperialist war.



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