

China's New Zealand ambassador warns against joining AUKUS

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China's ambassador to New Zealand, Wang Xiaolong, last week issued a warning to the National Party-led government not to get involved with AUKUS, the strategic and military pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and United States.

AUKUS is a vital component of the growing web of the US-led alliances escalating the drive to war against China in the Indo-Pacific.

In an interview with Radio NZ on November 27, Wang said if New Zealand was to join AUKUS it could have “negative consequences” for the country's relationship with Beijing. China is NZ's major trading partner, accounting for \$NZ20.76 billion, or 27 percent, of exports.

AUKUS involves the US and UK supplying Australia with nuclear-powered submarines and other weapons, along with military technology. It is part of the transformation of Australia into a base of operations for war against China, including stationing US troops, aircraft and warships in the north and west of the continent.

New Zealand is currently prevented by its 1987 anti-nuclear legislation from allowing the AUKUS submarines in its waters. It could join Pillar II of the agreement, possibly with Japan and South Korea, which would allow sharing of classified information and advanced military technology to ensure “interoperability” with US, Australian and allied forces.

Wang made clear that in China's view the two “pillars” of AUKUS cannot be separated. “These are exclusive blocs or alliances targeted at third countries, they never contribute to greater peace and stability,” he said. “On the contrary, they will lead to greater divisiveness, confrontation and even conflict and war.”

The ambassador noted that AUKUS entails the

transfer of weapons-grade nuclear materials from a nuclear armed state to a non-nuclear state for the first time in history, raising “serious questions about the integrity of the [nuclear] Non-Proliferation Treaty regime.”

He warned that the AUKUS discussions are already having a negative impact on the perceptions held by Chinese people as “consumers” of NZ products, who are becoming “confused and concerned.”

Wang declared: “Trust is one of the most precious and at the same time one of the most fragile commodities,” adding “it might take years to build up, but it might take just seconds to be destroyed.”

Reporting Wang's radio interview, China's state-run *Global Times* cited Chen Hong, a NZ specialist at East China Normal University, who reiterated that AUKUS's explicit purpose is “to weaken China's influence in the Asia-Pacific region through military deterrence and technological blockades.” While in the past New Zealand had shown “strong strategic resilience in balancing ties with major powers,” Chen said, the current government “appears to be gradually straying from this position on certain issues.”

NZ Prime Minister Luxon told Radio NZ the government was in “the same place” it was twelve months ago, “exploring” AUKUS. He brushed aside the ambassador's statements, saying “it's normal to have differences.” Labour leader Chris Hipkins said Wang's comments were “not helpful,” adding that New Zealand's foreign policy should not be based on “threats, implied or explicit.”

In a statement on December 1, Hipkins declared that Labour opposed joining AUKUS. “Labour is deeply concerned about how much time and effort this Government has spent getting closer to the US over the past year, when we spent six years in government

diversifying New Zealand's trade interests and staunchly defending our right to be independent," he said.

Labour's foreign affairs spokesperson David Parker added: "This does not mean we are non-aligned. We are a liberal western democracy and share those precious values with others. We support the rules-based order. We are part of Five Eyes [the US-led global intelligence-sharing alliance], which we also value."

In fact, the Labour government in the period 2017-2023, no less than National, cemented a close alliance with Washington, including by sending troops to Britain to train Ukrainian soldiers for the proxy war against Russia, and by joining numerous military exercises with the US and its allies aimed against China.

When AUKUS was first announced in 2021, Labour's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said she was "pleased to see" the growing orientation of the US and UK to the Pacific. Cabinet papers from March 2023 stated that the Labour-led government, which was supported by the Green Party, "welcomes AUKUS as an initiative to enhance regional security and stability... We are interested in discussing opportunities for cooperation on the non-nuclear aspects under Pillar Two of AUKUS."

Labour's Defence Minister Andrew Little released a Defence Policy Review in August 2023 aimed at preparing a "combat capable, ready force" to counter China. He declared if conflict broke out in the South China Sea, "we have a stake in that, and we may be called on to play a role."

The aggressive anti-China stance has strengthened under the National Party-ACT-NZ First coalition. Luxon told the *Financial Times* in July he was "very open" to joining AUKUS Pillar II and wanted NZ's military to be "highly interoperable with Australia" and a "force multiplier for Australia and the US and other partners."

Visiting Australia in August, Luxon reiterated that "we welcome AUKUS as an initiative to enhance regional security and stability."

In August, US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell said the US and Australia had "encouraged" New Zealand to invest more in its armed forces, especially in patrolling and policing the Pacific. He said after speaking with Luxon at the Pacific Islands Forum

in Tonga he had "high confidence" that New Zealand will increase its military capacity.

Luxon lost no time last month congratulating the fascist Donald Trump on his victory in the United States presidential election and vowing to build an "even closer" alliance with Washington, including "building security and resilience in the Indo-Pacific."

Despite its tactical differences over AUKUS, the Labour Party has no real disagreement with the government. It is concerned that dropping any pretence of an "independent foreign policy" will unnecessarily harm trade with China and inflame domestic opposition to war. Thousands of workers and young people in New Zealand have taken part in mass protests against the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza.

The increasingly pro-war trajectory of the country's ruling establishment was displayed during Foreign Minister Winston Peters' visit to Paris, Berlin and London last week.

Even as the NATO powers recklessly escalate the war with Russia, Peters declared New Zealand and France had "renewed efforts to work together more intensively in the Indo-Pacific." "The security of Europe, the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific are interconnected. New Zealand and France share deep strategic and security interests in both regions," he said.

After meeting with German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, Peters praised "Germany's contribution to Ukraine's defence," later announcing fresh NZ sanctions on "Iranians involved in the supply of ballistic missiles and drones to Russia, as well as Russians facilitating this trade."

Peters' tour, as a member of NATO's IP4 grouping of NZ, Australia, Japan and South Korea, underpinned the global alliance between all the imperialist countries, including minor ones such as New Zealand, for war with China as part of an emerging world war. In a deliberate provocation against China, Germany and France have both recently dispatched warships to the region, including to the disputed South China Sea.



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