

How the New Zealand Cabinet Learned to Stop Worrying About the Bomb and Love NATO

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As Aotearoa/New Zealand's Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control within the Labour-Alliance coalition government in 1999, I was mandated to promote NZ's opposition to nuclear weapons and membership of aggressive military blocs such as NATO to the world. And I did.

What I did not realise at the time — and should have, having read Ralph Miliband on “Parliamentary Socialism” — was that all the top brass of the NZ military, intelligence services and the top civil servants were working overtime to assure the United States' officials that NZ would eventually return to the fold (not their words of course) as a junior imperialist power in the South Pacific and supporter of US military-led alliances. And this is what is happening.

NZ's anti-nuclear policy and its correlative opposition to nuclear armed military blocs was based on the 1987 *Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament and Arms Control Act*, legislated by the then-Labour government, to reinforce membership of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty or the Treaty of Rarotonga.

These strong anti-nuclear policies, which had seen New Zealand turfed out of the ANZUS military pact by its “allies” — with Australian **PM Bob Hawke** being particularly insistent — were forced upon the Labour government by a vibrant mass movement that had spilled over into Labour's base.

Labour leaders were to cynically state that conceding an anti-nuclear position was worth it, to distract attention from the blitzkrieg that forced through the neoliberal program of wholesale privatisation, deregulation and an end to free public healthcare and education. Indeed, in the period of the anti-nuclear campaign's success, NZ suffered the

implementation of the complete neoliberal agenda and roll back of the welfare state. This betrayal of the gains of the labour movement saw Labour crash in 1990 to its worst electoral defeat.

Now, Labour's successors are implementing a new betrayal: of the gains of the mass anti-war movement. The roots of that powerful movement lay in the opposition to the US imperialist war on Vietnam, a war crime in which both Australia and NZ participated, and which, in turn fed into the mass anti-nuclear movement, opposition to South African Apartheid and the subjugation of East Timor.

Opposition to nuclear weapons and military blocs with nuclear weapons was so strong that even the conservative National Party was forced to endorse it. National's opposition leader Don Brash told visiting US senators in 2004 that the anti-nuclear policy would be gone by lunchtime if National was re-elected. In fact, it was Brash who was gone — if not by lunchtime at least by afternoon tea — and National confirmed its commitment to NZ being nuclear free.

Former PM Jacinda Ardern — touted by the Western media as a promoter of peace and goodwill — visited the US in May last year. There she met with US **President Joe Biden** and **Kurt Campbell**, Biden's US Indo-Pacific National Security Coordinator, among others.

Defence minister **Andrew Little** also met with Campbell last month and on March 23, confirmed to [The Guardian](#) that NZ was discussing joining AUKUS Pillar Two — the non-nuclear part of the defence alliance founded by Australia, Britain and the US. Pillar Two covers the sharing of advanced military technologies, including quantum computing and artificial intelligence.

Labour has also enthusiastically, but without any public discussion, become part of NATO's Asia Pacific 4 (AP4): Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and Japan.

It appears — from the many statements and actions and visits by the top panjandrums of the US, NATO and others — that a deal has been done on AUKUS Pillar Two and its greater integration with AP4.

Apparently AP4 is “a love at this stage that dare not speak its name”, even though NATO head Jens Stoltenberg recently proclaimed it at a [speech](#) at Tokyo's Keio University in February, reported by Geoffrey Miller's April 11 piece for [democracyproject.nz](#). Stoltenberg told his audience that NATO had “in many ways ... already institutionalised” the AP4 and described the four countries' participation at the NATO leaders' summit in Spain in 2022 as a “historic moment”, wrote Miller.

NATO Policy Planning Head **Benedetta Berti** will speak at the NZ Institute of International Affairs (NZIIA) conference this week — where in 2021 Campbell and Ardern performed a show of mutual admiration as the NZ PM welcomed the “democratic” and “rules-based” US back into the Pacific, to confront China.

At NZIIA, no doubt, Berti will explain how NATO, the largest military force in the world with a nuclear First Strike policy and bases everywhere, is expanding its ties with the AP4 to contain an aggressive and militaristic China.

NZ's foreign minister **Nanaia Mahuta** [attended](#) the annual NATO foreign ministers' meeting in Brussels this month — alongside her counterparts from Australia, Japan and South Korea.

Recently appointed PM Chris Hipkins will travel to the NATO Leaders' Summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, in July (in the company of other Asia Pacific members) and no doubt show Russia (and China our biggest trading partner) that we are part of Russia's greatest fear — the continual advance of nuclear-armed NATO and its allies right up to the Russian border.

NZ's participation in the Talisman Sabre and Rim of the Pacific military exercises and interoperability are all part of preparing NZ for this aggression.

Miller has demonstrated that the greatest betrayal has begun: NZ's total integration into nuclear-armed NATO; participation in the containment strategy of China as part of the NATO Pacific strategy; and as part of Pillar Two AUKUS with cybersecurity etc. as part of the excuse.

There appears to be more softening up of NZ's position to come. Recent comments I heard from Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade officials — that the 1987 legislation is out of date — certainly indicate as much.

Only Te Pati Maori (the Maori Party) seems prepared to fight and there is not a peep from within Labour. We have a fight (to use a militaristic term) on our hands.

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Featured image: A Labour contingent at a 1972 anti-Vietnam war protest in Auckland. Photo: John Miller

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