

New Zealand's New Prime Minister Is Making Nice with China

By [Prof. Derek Grossman](#)

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*Since taking over as prime minister of New Zealand in January, **Chris Hipkins** has subtly stepped back from the assertive language predecessor **Jacinda Ardern** previously used in reference to China.*

Wellington's return to speaking softly about and to Beijing suggests that it will be even more reluctant than before to support America's stepped-up Indo-Pacific strategy for countering China, or to engage with related multilateral groupings such as the Quad and AUKUS.

Ardern, by contrast, marked a milestone in June 2022 by becoming the first Kiwi leader to address a summit of NATO nations as the Western alliance began putting more focus on China.

At the event, [Ardern called out Beijing](#) for being "more assertive and more willing to challenge international rules and norms." She argued that "we must respond to the actions we see ... [and] speak out against human rights abuses at all times when and where we see them."

Two months earlier, she issued a statement with U.S. President Joe Biden expressing concern about "the establishment of a persistent military presence in the Pacific by a state that does not share our values or security interest" after China signed a security agreement

with the Solomon Islands.

Hipkins has been noticeably more circumspect. At the NATO summit last month in Vilnius, Lithuania, the prime minister merely observed that “China’s increasing assertiveness is resulting in geopolitical change and competition.”

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Derek Grossman is a senior defense analyst at the think tank RAND Corp. in Santa Monica, California, and adjunct professor in the practice of political science and international relations at the University of Southern California. He formerly served as an intelligence adviser at the Pentagon.

Featured image: Profile Photo of Chris Hipkins, Member of Parliament for Remutaka and current Prime Minister of New Zealand. (Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0)

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