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# Parliament unanimously passes Russia sanctions law, first step in 'significant' change for NZ's foreign policy

Thomas Manch · 22:13, Mar 09 2022

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Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta speaks on the Russia Sanctions Bill in March.

Parliament has unanimously passed a Russia sanctions regime into law, allowing the Government to directly sanction the country for invading Ukraine and marking a "significant" shift in New Zealand's foreign policy.

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“Today's legislation allows us to step up our response to Russia's grave unprovoked war on the Ukrainian people,” Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta said, in a speech early in the evening.

“It is evident that a united global approach to its actions will require sustained endurance and what I have called a wall of resistance.”

ROBERT KITCHIN/STUFF

Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta introduced a Russian Sanctions Bill into the House on Wednesday. (file photo)

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The Government had previously been unwilling to give itself the power to unilaterally lay sanctions outside those agreed to by the United Nations Security Council.

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But Russian President Vladimir Putin's brutal invasion of Ukraine that was launched two weeks ago has pushed the Government into not only sanctioning Russia, but promising to create a broader sanctions framework in the future comparable to that used by partners such as the United Kingdom and Australia.

The entire Parliament voted the bill into law on Wednesday evening.

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National Party foreign affairs spokesman Gerry Brownlee backed the Government's Russia Sanctions Bill in a debate in March (above) but says the sanctions themselves have been too weak.

The fact that all parties in the Parliament had decided sanctions were required was a "significant step" for New Zealand's foreign policy, Victoria University strategic studies professor Robert Ayson said.

He said it was also striking to hear the Government speak of the failure of multilateral diplomacy to avert conflict – comments which appeared stark when compared with Mahuta's inaugural speech a year ago in which she said New Zealand would "lean in" to multilateralism.

In the House, Mahuta said that New Zealand "believes strongly in international rules-based order and the multilateral system, but this time, the UN Security Council failed us".

"With Russia vetoing any UN sanction, but the UN General Assembly making it very clear with a vote of 141 to five to condemn Russia's actions, New Zealand feels it is appropriate to pass this bill."

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ROBERT KITCHIN/STUFF

National Party foreign affairs spokesman Gerry Brownlee said the Government was right to pass a sanctions law, but had been too late.

National Party foreign affairs spokesman Gerry Brownlee, who has pushed for the Government to pass a broader sanctions regime into law, said Mahuta had shown leadership by bringing the bill forward but “we’re too late getting here”.

“There are those who say, ‘Well, we should continue to support the multilateral approach’, that we should continue with the efforts of diplomacy through the United Nations and other bodies.

“The United Nations Security Council arrangement with its veto available to the five permanent members leaves us in a very awkward position, and therefore it is necessary for us to have our own law that allows us to work outside that.”

Green Party co-leader James Shaw said Putin's Russia and its invasion of Ukraine resembled Hitler's Nazi Germany and its invasion of neighbouring countries in the lead up to the Second World War.



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BRADEN FASTIER / STUFF

Green Party co-leader James Shaw said comparisons could be drawn between Hitler's Germany and Putin's Russia. (file photo)

"The invasion of the Ukraine has finally spurred the world to act to stop Vladimir Putin and his regime ... There are many differences, but the big difference, of course, is that in this case, the world is attempting to use as little violence as possible, de-escalation and the use of sanctions."

The Green Party tabled a supplementary order paper asking that a reference in the bill to the UN General Assembly vote be brought into the "operative" part of the bill. The paper was voted down by all other parties.

ACT Party foreign affairs spokeswoman Brooke van Velden said New Zealand had been the "weakest link in the West"

"We should have been standing with those other countries for liberal democracy for values of freedom weeks ago."

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The Russia sanctions law would allow the Government to sanction people, companies and assets that are tied to the invasion or are of "economic or strategic relevance" to the country. Sanctions would be laid in the coming weeks, Mahuta said on Wednesday, as Ministry of Foreign and Trade officials were working urgently to determine what and who might be targetted.

Sanctions could also be applied to trade, financial institutions, and to the ability for superyachts and aircraft owned by Russians to enter New Zealand.

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The law broadly resembled the proposed autonomous sanctions bill which the Labour Government twice refused to progress through the House.

However, it included a clause that said the minister must be satisfied the UN Security Council will not act in response to a threat to peace, due to a member of the council wielding its veto, before sanctions could be laid.

“What it means is that the Government will still continue to emphasise multilateralism when it can, but basically, to say diplomacy has failed,” Ayson said.

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