

Cheney's trip to Japan and Australia: the preparation for new war crimes

Socialist Equality Party (Australia)
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US Vice President Dick Cheney's trip to Japan and Australia this week is an affront to the democratic rights of the American, Japanese and Australian people. In defiance of majority antiwar sentiment in all three countries, Cheney's goal is stepped up support for the criminal occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq and for the Bush administration's preparations for war against Iran.

Just three months ago, in the November congressional elections, the American people overwhelmingly repudiated the Iraq war. Four years of bloodshed have virtually destroyed Iraq and killed or displaced more than four million of its people. Over 3,100 American soldiers are dead and another 50,000 injured. In Japan and Australia, large majorities oppose their government's support for the US-led occupation. A recent BBC poll, for example, found that 78 percent of Australians disapprove of the war.

Cheney has played a central role in the lead-up to, and prosecution of, the Iraq war. More than any other figure within the White House, he scripted the false claims that Iraq possessed "weapons of mass destruction" in order to fabricate the justification for war. Defining the theme that shaped every public utterance by US government officials up to the March 2003 invasion, Cheney declared on August 26, 2002: "Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction."

Since the early 1990s, Cheney's political life has been bound up with plotting the neo-colonial takeover of the Middle East. He represents that faction of the American ruling elite that aspires to establish a stranglehold over much of the world's supply of oil and to use it to block other powers, such as the European Union, Russia and China, from challenging the global hegemony of American imperialism. Iran, with the third largest reserves of oil and second largest reserves of natural gas, is the next target after Iraq. Cheney's national security advisor John Hannah reportedly told a recent meeting that the Bush administration considers 2007 "the year of Iran"

The US vice-president personifies the sinister relationship between the Bush administration's foreign policy and the interests of major American energy corporations. While serving as the chief executive officer of the Halliburton oil conglomerate between 1995 and 2000, he also co-founded the

Project for a New American Century (PNAC), which agitated for a military build-up to ensure US global domination through an invasion of Iraq and a confrontation with Iran.

In September 2000, the PNAC wrote that a "catastrophic and catalysing event—like a new Pearl Harbour" would create the conditions for a rapid change in US foreign policy. One year later, Cheney, along with figures such as former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, directed the eruption of militarism that followed the still unexplained events of September 11, 2001.

The government of any country that upheld the legal precedents established following World War II would charge Cheney with war crimes as soon as he set foot on its territory. He is the power-behind-the-throne of an administration that has launched two illegal wars of aggression and carried out mass killings and torture in order to establish its domination over the world's key oil and gas producing region. Waging a war of aggression was the principal charge against the Nazi leaders at the Nuremberg trials.

In both Japan and Australia, however, Cheney is being welcomed and ushered into secretive meetings with top government officials. In Tokyo, he meets today with the Emperor and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. According to American officials, Cheney will seek to shake down the Japanese government for billions of dollars in financial contributions to the US puppet regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq. He has refused to meet with Japanese Defence Minister Fumio Kyuma who has recently been mildly critical of the US-led invasion of Iraq.

In Australia, Cheney will, however, meet on Friday with Kevin Rudd, leader of the opposition Australian Labor Party and an ardent defender of the US-Australian military alliance. On Saturday, he will hold a closed-door session with Prime Minister John Howard and his key cabinet ministers and national security advisors.

The Australian political establishment is already using Cheney's visit to demonstrate its unconditional solidarity with US militarism. Howard has announced the opening of a new American base in Western Australia that will spy on communications in the Middle East, as well as the dispatch of 50 to 70 Australian military trainers to join the 1,400 Australian

military personnel currently in Iraq. Labor has endorsed the new base and Rudd has indicated his support for additional Australian forces to be sent to Afghanistan.

The Howard government, with the full backing of the Labor opposition, has performed a pivotal function for the Bush administration. It deployed military forces to the invasions of both Afghanistan and Iraq and has served as the most consistent international apologist for US atrocities. It has left Australian citizen David Hicks to rot for five years in Guantánamo Bay so as not to call into question the legality of the regime of arbitrary imprisonment and torture to which he has been subjected.

In return, Howard has received ongoing US backing for his government's aggressive assertion of Australian corporate and strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific. This has included aggressive military interventions into East Timor, the Solomon Islands and other Pacific states, demands for Australia's entry into Asian trade forums and the signing of a free-trade pact with the US itself.

Under conditions where the Bush administration is refusing to rule out war over its allegations that Iran is attempting to construct nuclear weapons and supplying weapons to Iraqi insurgents for attacks on American forces, Cheney's trip is ominous. He suffers poor health and rarely travels overseas on matters of state. When he does, it is always for reasons of the highest priority for the Bush White House and its militarist agenda. His last trip was to Saudi Arabia in November, 2006 when he cajoled the Saudi monarchy to back the administration's plans for a surge of troops into Iraq and to help forge an anti-Iranian alliance of Arab states. Following Cheney's visit, Saudi Arabia increased oil production in order to force down prices and place greater economic pressure on Iran.

The Iranian regime has categorically denied the US allegations, and the Bush administration has produced no evidence to support them. Nevertheless Washington is accelerating its preparations for war. Two aircraft carrier battle groups are now in the Persian Gulf, while state-of-the-art air bases have been completed at Bagram in Afghanistan and near Balad in Iraq that would facilitate a round-the-clock aerial bombardment of Iran's military, economic and political infrastructure. The CIA is allegedly conducting covert operations inside the country, attempting to provoke unrest against the regime among the country's numerous ethnic minorities.

Tensions are steadily rising. Last week, Tehran accused the US of involvement in a terrorist attack in southeast Iran which killed 11 Iranian soldiers. This week, the deadline expires for Iran to comply with a United Nations resolution instructing it to cease enriching uranium.

While the official purpose of Cheney's visits is to "thank" the Japanese and Australian governments for their "efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan", the context leaves little doubt that the administration's plans for a confrontation with Iran will be the

key issue on the agenda with its principal allies in the Pacific.

Cheney's talks with political leaders in Japan and Australia constitute gatherings of what can only be described as an international criminal cabal. Behind the backs of ordinary people, sordid deals will be done to escalate the criminal violence emanating from Washington. In exchange for ongoing US support, Abe and Howard will be expected, at the very least, to echo US lies and fabrications about Tehran in the UN and other forums, as they did in relation to Iraq, thus providing a veneer of international support for further Bush administration war crimes.

Not one question has been raised in the Australian parliament or mass media over the steadily escalating threats against Iran. No one within the official establishment has demanded answers from Howard or Rudd as to whether they will support US military action. Instead, a conspiracy of silence is underway to prevent working people from being alerted to the Bush administration's advanced preparations for an even bloodier conflict in the Middle East.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) have issued the call for an international mobilisation of working people, students and youth against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the war drive against Iran.

The political basis of such a movement must be the complete independence of the working class from the establishment political parties; the demand for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan and Iraq; the arrest and prosecution of the political leaders responsible for the war, including John Howard and his cabinet; opposition to all forms of communalism and nationalism; and a struggle for the socialist reorganisation of society to meet the needs and aspirations of the vast majority of the world's population.

The Socialist Equality Party in Australia is standing in the NSW elections to advance this program. We urge all opponents of militarism and war to support the SEP campaign politically and practically, to vote for our candidates and to make the decision to join and build our party.



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