

Political stench of 2010 coup haunts Australian PM

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Confirmation that Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard was plotting to replace her predecessor, Kevin Rudd, at least two weeks before his ouster on June 24, 2010 has further undermined her leadership and compounded the ongoing political instability in Canberra.

A “Four Corners” program aired on Monday on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) revealed that the Obama administration knew of the moves to oust Rudd two weeks before the coup. US involvement in the events of June 2010 points to the significance of mounting tensions between the US and China in the removal of Rudd.

This highly sensitive aspect of the ABC program has been studiously ignored in the Australian media. Instead, attention has focussed on a “victory speech” written for Gillard by her advisors a fortnight before the coup. She continues to insist that she only made the decision to challenge Rudd on June 23, 2010, and absurdly claims that the speech was simply the work of overzealous speech writers.

The latest revelations are particularly damaging because Gillard’s leadership has been tainted from the outset by the stench of the June 2010 events. She was installed in an unprecedented inner party coup, orchestrated by a handful of Labor and union factional bosses operating without the knowledge of most ministers and Labor parliamentarians, let alone the public. She has never been able to dispel the widespread belief that she betrayed Rudd, that her actions were anti-democratic and that her government lacks legitimacy.

Gillard’s patently false version of events was further undermined by statements to the media yesterday by Labor MPs who confirmed that she had shown them polling depicting her in a better light than Rudd. “The MPs are now prepared to speak on a background basis because they are disenchanted with her leadership, angry at her level of candour in her public comments this week, and no longer prepared to support her in any party ballot for the leadership,” the *Sydney Morning Herald* wrote.

Comments and articles abound on the current leadership manoeuvring inside the Labor Party. Nothing, however, is being written on the implications of the previously unknown fact that the

Australian ambassador to the US, Kim Beazley, met with the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in early June to discuss the possible removal of Rudd. Along with domestic considerations—above all the demands of big business for tough austerity measures—US hostility to Rudd’s foreign policy was a decisive factor in his ouster.

The ABC program stated: “Four Corners has learned that about two weeks before the eventual coup, Ambassador Kim Beazley was driven the few blocks to the State Department for a meeting with US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton. Four Corners has been told that Clinton wanted to know what was happening in Australia, and sought assurances that the relationship between the two nations would not change under a new leadership. What Beazley knew or told his hosts is not known, but it seems they were better informed than most government MPs, who were unaware that Rudd’s enemies were circling for the kill.”

The account cannot be taken on face value. “Four Corners” itself noted that the key Labor coup plotters, as revealed in WikiLeaks cables, had long been secretly informing Washington about the internal workings of the Labor government. The same cables make clear that the Obama administration was disenchanted with Rudd over a range of issues, especially his attempts to moderate rising tensions between the US and China. Gillard, on the other hand, was viewed in positive terms as someone who could be counted on to toe Washington’s line.

The latest revelation confirms the assessment made by the Socialist Equality Party just four days after Rudd’s removal: “Thirty-five years ago, in the midst of the last major global crisis of the capitalist system, the Whitlam Labor government was sacked in a coup involving the highest levels of the state apparatus, as well as intelligence agencies including the American CIA. No doubt these same forces were either directly involved in, or at least had knowledge of, the ousting of Rudd.” (See: “The Australian Labor Party coup: a warning to the working class”)

So sensitive is the question of US involvement in the June 2010 events that the “Four Corners” program made no effort to further probe the issue. No attempt was made to elicit a response from Beazley or Clinton. The WikiLeaks cables were mentioned in passing but not examined in any depth. The Australian political

and media establishment has treated the topic as taboo, with barely a reference to the Beazley-Clinton meeting.

While no date was given for the Beazley-Clinton meeting, the events of that period indicate Washington's hardening attitude against Rudd.

The Australian government expelled an Israeli diplomat on May 24 over Israel's use of forged Australian passports in the assassination of a top Hamas leader in Dubai. The decision undoubtedly alienated not only Israel and the Zionist lobby in Australia, but the Obama administration as well. Greg Sheridan, foreign editor of the *Australian*, later commented that the expulsion might have been "the single foreign policy issue that did Rudd the most harm."

Growing resistance by Rudd and Defence Minister John Faulkner to the Pentagon's demands for an expanded Australian military presence in Afghanistan culminated in an announcement on June 23 that the Labor government would consider withdrawing Australian troops within two to four years. The decision cut directly across the Obama administration's push for greater involvement in the Afghan occupation by US allies.

Above all, it was Rudd's opposition to the Obama administration's increasingly confrontational stance throughout Asia against China that disturbed the White House. The Australian prime minister had proposed an Asia Pacific Community which, as he explained in an essay for *Foreign Affairs* (never published), was "to help prevent a US-China strategic fault line through East Asia." Clinton, on the other hand, was aggressively intervening to undermine China's influence, declaring at the ASEAN summit in July 2009 that the US was "back in South East Asia."

Rudd was one of two political casualties in June 2010. On June 2, Japan's Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama resigned, following bitter wrangling with Washington over his government's election promise to move a US Marine base off the Japanese island of Okinawa. Like Rudd, he was committed to his country's military alliance with the US, but indicated a certain shift toward greater cooperation with China and South Korea. Hatoyama was replaced by Naoto Kan, who immediately pledged the closest cooperation with the US and took a more antagonistic approach to China.

An ominous warning sign that Washington had dropped its support for Rudd was Obama's decision on June 4 to unexpectedly cancel a planned trip to Australia, on the pretext that he had to deal with the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. The US president was due to arrive in Australia on June 19—just days before Rudd's ousting—suggesting that the White House not only knew about the coup in general terms, but was more directly involved and had detailed inside information.

Having ousted Rudd on June 24, Gillard delivered her "victory speech"—prepared, at least in part, two weeks before—outlining her unconditional loyalty to the US-Australia military alliance. On the

same day, she held a 20-minute phone conversation with Obama and met with the US ambassador. Four days later, Gillard repudiated Faulkner's statement on Afghanistan, declaring in an opinion piece that "bringing home our troops cannot be to a pre-set timetable."

The Gillard government quickly shifted diplomatic gear to full support for the Obama administration's intervention in Asia. In July 2010, Clinton provocatively declared that the US had a "national interest" in the South China Sea and sided with ASEAN members in their maritime disputes with China. Gillard's backing for Obama culminated in his visit last November when the two unveiled plans for the stationing of US Marines in the northern city of Darwin and a greatly expanded use of Australian naval and air bases by the US military. A key purpose of the US-Australian military collaboration is to tighten American control of vital sea lanes used by China to import energy and raw materials from Africa and the Middle East.

As in the case of the Beazley-Clinton meeting, the Australian media and political establishment has maintained a deafening silence on the Gillard government's decision to put the country on the frontline of a conflict between the US and China. Any discussion would only exacerbate the dilemma confronting the Australian ruling class: how to balance between China, its number one trade partner, and the United States, its longstanding strategic ally.

Despite the mounting political crisis surrounding Gillard, amid moves by Rudd's supporters to mount a leadership challenge, powerful sections of the Australian ruling elite, while unhappy with the current Labor government, remain adamantly opposed to the return of Rudd. One of the more bizarre expressions of the Murdoch empire's support for Gillard appeared in yesterday's *Australian*—a front-page comment by political editor Dennis Shanahan which, in the face of indisputable evidence to the contrary, began by unequivocally declaring that he believed Gillard's account of the June 2010 events.

Shanahan's declaration of trust expresses the frustrations of powerful sections of the Australian ruling class with the fact that they are stuck with Gillard because they have no faith in either Rudd or Opposition Leader Tony Abbott to hold together a viable government. Amid intensifying geo-political rivalries in Asia and a worsening global economic crisis, the stage is being set for an explosive political crisis that could quickly dwarf the events of June 2010.



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