

Australia to use UN Security Council seat to support US militarism

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Australia was elected last Friday by 140 of the 193 member-states to a temporary seat on the UN's 15-member Security Council. The vote was held after a four-year campaign by the Australian Labor government against rival bids by Finland and Luxemburg. The decision ensures that Washington, which unquestionably played the major role in lining up the necessary votes for Australia, will have a vocal advocate for US foreign policy on the Security Council over the next two years.

From outside the Security Council, the Gillard government played a significant role in drumming up support for the no-fly zone against Libya in 2011, which was exploited by the US and the NATO powers to bombard the country and bring about the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi's regime.

In her official statement hailing the vote, Prime Minister Julia Gillard wasted no time signalling the pro-US agenda that Australia will aggressively advocate once it takes its seat at the beginning of 2013. She made clear that Australia would insist that the UN "deal with the scourge of [nuclear] proliferation in our world, and particularly the circumstances in Iran and North Korea."

Gillard's speech to the UN General Assembly on September 26 echoed US and Israeli warnings that time was running out for Iran to answer the myriad unproven allegations about its nuclear programs. The Australian government is already supporting crippling economic sanctions against the country, and if the US does attack, Australia will undoubtedly back yet another illegal US-led war, this time from inside the UN Security Council.

Gillard also made clear that her government would agitate for the UN to take tougher action on Syria to assist US-backed "rebels" to overthrow the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. She declared the Security Council would have to "wrestle with the violence in Syria and the way in which that violence can be brought to an end". She also stressed that Australia would expect the UN Security Council to continue to endorse the "fight against global terror"—a euphemism for the US-led occupation of Afghanistan, illegal US drone attacks inside Pakistan and Yemen and the entire web of US operations being carried on the fraudulent pretext of combatting terrorism.

While the Middle East was the immediate focus of Gillard's comments, her government has been one of the most ardent supporters of the Obama administration's so-called "pivot" to Asia—a diplomatic and strategic offensive aimed at undermining China's influence. Tensions have been steadily rising as a result. With Washington's backing, the Philippines and Vietnam have more aggressively asserted territorial claims against China over islands in the South China Sea, while Japan has provoked Chinese protests by "nationalising" disputed islands in the East China Sea. At the same time, the US has encouraged India to build-up its military forces, further destabilising relations in the region.

Even as the danger of conflict between the US and China grows, the Gillard government has unconditionally aligned itself with Washington. Last November, it offered up the north and west of the Australian continent as a key military staging base for US naval operations in the critical sea lanes between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, through which Chinese

imports of oil and other raw materials from the Middle East and Africa have to pass. American and Australian forces are being positioned to threaten a blockade of these key trading routes.

Washington will utilise the UN Security Council, among other international forums, to pressure China to bow to American demands.

The UN is not some independent body, where all members states, large and small, have equal sway. On the contrary, it was created by the victors of World War II, above all the US, to put their stamp on the postwar order and mediate conflicts with their rivals. The UN has always been a venue for sordid imperialist intrigues and machinations. Five countries—the US, Britain, France, Russia and China—have permanent seats on its Security Council, with the right to veto any decision.

Since the end of the Cold War, the US—which emerged from World War II as the new imperialist hegemon—has brazenly exploited the UN Security Council to provide an official fig leaf for its agenda of aggressive wars and interventions. UN resolutions have supported a series of US-backed neo-colonial operations—from the 1991 Gulf War against Iraq, to interventions during the 1990s in Somalia and the Balkans and the 1999 Australian-led takeover of East Timor, to the war on Yugoslavia and the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan.

In general, Russia and China have acquiesced to Washington in order to avoid conflict. When they, along with Germany and France, did not explicitly endorse the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the US demonstrated its contempt for the UN and launched its illegal assault anyway, with the support of Britain, Australia and Poland. The other major powers quickly fell into line, voting in the UN to endorse the US occupation regime in Iraq.

Amid rising geo-political tensions, however, open clashes on the UN Security Council are becoming more frequent. The US and its allies have already denounced Russia and China for failing to support tougher resolutions on Syria that would have opened the door for more overt military support for the US-sponsored

“rebels”.

The Australian government has been congratulating itself on its “win” on the international stage. But its presence on the Security Council will only bring into sharper relief the basic dilemma facing the Australian ruling elite—its strategic dependence on the US military alliance and, at the same time, its economic reliance on China.

China Institute of International Studies analyst Wang Zhenyu pointed to Beijing’s concerns over Australia’s election to the Security Council. He told the *Australian Financial Review* that China would expect Australia to take “an unbiased attitude” to the territorial disputes in the South China Sea and East China Sea and to “not always vote” with the US. He declared that the UN seat was an opportunity to “show Australian independence”.

In reality, since World War II and Canberra’s strategic shift from Britain to the US, Australian imperialism has invariably asserted its interests in the Pacific, in Asia and internationally only with Washington’s support. In return, it has functioned as an uncritical and unconditional US ally. As Gillard has already indicated, this will be Australia’s role, during the next two years, on the UN Security Council.



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