

Former Australian PM urges US-China rapprochement

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Former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd last week made multiple public appearances in the US promoting an essay he wrote for the *Foreign Affairs* journal, “Beyond the Pivot: A New Road Map for US-Chinese Relations”. The article further developed Rudd’s long standing demand that US imperialism curtail its aggressive military confrontation of Beijing and instead reach a new strategic agreement with the rising Asian power.

After speaking on these issues at an Asian Leadership Conference in Seoul and the National Defence University in Beijing, he was received by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Harvard Kennedy School, and the Council on Foreign Relations, publisher of *Foreign Affairs*.

The warm reception stood in marked contrast to the situation four years ago, when as prime minister, Rudd submitted a similar article to his latest one on US-China relations to *Foreign Affairs*, only to see it rejected. The 2009 article centred on Rudd’s call for an “Asia Pacific Community”, a proposal that was implicitly premised on the US ceding some of its hegemony to Beijing.

Rudd has never been an opponent of the Australian alliance with US imperialism, but was deeply worried about the implications of a conflict between Canberra’s traditional military and diplomatic ally, the US, and its most important economic partner, China. His diplomatic proposals cut across the Obama administration’s “pivot”—its drive to militarily and diplomatically encircle China. Washington wanted a loyal proxy in Canberra, not a prime minister who believed he had a semi-independent role to play in mediating American-Chinese relations. Just over 12 months after his 2009 *Foreign Affairs* article was rejected—and after Obama twice cancelled scheduled

visits to Australia—Rudd was removed as prime minister in a Labor Party coup, in which Washington played a direct role.

Now, in 2013, Rudd remains in the cold as far as the Obama administration is concerned. Notably, no one from the White House met with the former prime minister during his time in Washington D.C. Amid an escalating economic and social crisis within the US, the Obama administration remains determined to take whatever steps are necessary, including military force, to prevent China or any other rival from challenging US imperialism’s global hegemony. Julia Gillard remains the loyal proxy in Canberra for this agenda.

At the same time, however, the last four years have seen the emergence of a new constituency for Rudd’s perspective within the US foreign policy establishment.

There are growing concerns within US ruling circles that the “pivot” to Asia is threatening a devastating war. As in Australia, there are powerful corporate interests in the US with close ties to the Chinese economy which are put at risk by Obama’s policies.

Since 2009, the Obama administration has deployed additional military forces to Australia and several of its East Asian allies and encouraged China’s neighbours to aggressively pursue their claims in previously localised territorial disputes in the South China Sea and East China Sea. As a result, the entire region has become a tinderbox—as Rudd has described it, “the region increasingly resembles a 21st-century maritime redux of the Balkans a century ago”.

Former US national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote an article in February for the *New York Times* urging that Washington recast its role in Asia as an “‘off-shore’ balancing influence, with no entanglements in the region’s rivalries and no attempt to attain domination over the region”. He sharply

criticised the Obama administration for excluding China from its proposed regional economic framework, the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Brzezinski concluded: “History can avoid repeating the calamitous conflicts of the 20th century if America is present in Asia as stabiliser—not a would-be policeman—and if China becomes the preeminent, but not domineering, power in the region.”

Rudd has received the support of figures like Brzezinski. Like Brzezinski, the former Australian PM deliberately avoids any direct criticisms of Obama’s “pivot”, instead welcoming US imperialism’s new military-strategic focus on Asia as a useful bargaining chip with Beijing.

Rudd declared in his *Foreign Affairs* article, “there was a danger that China, with its hard-line, realist view of international relations, would conclude that an economically exhausted United States was losing its staying power in the Pacific”. However, now “that it is clear that the United States will remain in Asia for the long haul”, there are better prospects of Beijing responding to a Washington offer of a new strategic agreement.

The article proposed a series of diplomatic mechanisms, including regular high level summits between Obama and the new Chinese leadership and closer ties between the countries’ two militaries as a means of easing tensions and avoiding conflict.

Rudd developed on this theme in a lengthy lecture delivered to Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in Washington D.C. on April 2.

Warning that there was a widening “strategic trust deficit” between China and the United States, and that “there are times in human history that the sheer density and complexity of political and security challenges on the agenda begins to reach a critical mass or a tipping point”, Rudd proposed that Washington initiate a new “strategic roadmap” with Beijing. He declared that while there was no guarantee that this would resolve mounting tensions, “the alternative is to allow strategic drift to set in—where drift sees strategic competition ultimately trending towards conflict or even war”.

Rudd assured his American audiences that his proposals did not mean that the prospect of waging war against China was off the table. On the contrary, as he insisted, “such a roadmap of step by step strategic cooperation with China is entirely compatible with

traditional US hedging strategy against a range of possible Chinese strategic futures”. He added: “What is recommended here is not some high-minded exercise in foreign policy idealism. Rather it is grounded in strategic realism.”

None of the rival foreign policy factions within the Australian or American ruling elites have any solution to the escalating geo-strategic crisis in East Asia. Behind the backs of the Australian and American people, the Gillard government and Obama administration are preparing for a war that would likely cause the deaths of hundreds of millions of people throughout the region.

Rudd’s proposed diplomatic solution to the crisis is ultimately based on nothing more than wishful thinking—he maintains that if only Obama and the new Chinese leadership can get to know each other and thoroughly discuss their differences, then solutions will present themselves.

In reality, the explosive situation throughout East Asia is only one expression of a wider global phenomenon—the inexorable decline of US imperialism and the attempt by the American ruling elite to extricate itself from the crisis through the use of military force. The threat of imperialist war can be only be averted through the unified struggle of the international working class of Australia, the US, China and the world to abolish its root cause—capitalism and its outmoded nation state system—and establish socialism.



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