

A phony election “debate” on Australian foreign policy

Peter Symonds—SEP Senate candidate for Western Australia
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The conspiracy of silence being conducted by the entire Australian political and media establishment over US war preparations against China was demonstrated once again on Wednesday night, in a debate between the Labor government’s foreign minister Bob Carr and his Liberal opposition counterpart, Julie Bishop.

Hosted by the Lowy Institute, a Sydney-based think tank, the “debate” was notable only for its banality and bipartisan unanimity on virtually every issue, including the reactionary bidding war between the two major parties on punitive measures against asylum seekers.

In response to a panel question from Paul Kelly, editor-at-large at Rupert Murdoch’s *Australian*, both Carr and Bishop flatly denied that there was any possibility of military conflict between China and the United States. Kelly had pointed to the basic dilemma facing the Australian ruling class—its economic reliance on China while, at the same time, maintaining its geo-strategic and military dependence on the US. “How should we prepare for tensions between the United States and China that might lead to conflict?” he asked.

Bishop blandly declared that she did not subscribe to the theory “that the United States and China will at some stage end up in military conflict. I believe that the United States and China are now so interdependent that there is far too much for them to lose to engage militarily.” While there would be tensions, she said, “I do not believe that Australia will be asked to choose between our growing economic reliance on China and our increasing defence ties with the United States.”

Carr agreed with Bishop’s “optimism”, declaring: “Both sides have got a big stake in making this relationship work... When there has been a slide to what might have been a misunderstanding between China and the United States both sides have done the right thing.” He proposed that Australia encourage resource-

sharing arrangements between China and its neighbours to encourage a peaceful resolution to territorial disputes in the South China, and East China Seas.

None of the panel of questioners challenged these fallacies and obfuscations, or the underlying assumptions—either during the debate or subsequently in the media, which has barely bothered to note the event. While the likelihood of a devastating US-China war is being continually canvassed in the rarefied atmosphere of foreign policy circles, the code of silence continues as far as any wider debate is concerned. The purpose is to chloroform workers and youth as to the immense dangers they confront.

To declare that the Australian government will not be compelled to choose between the US and China is simply false. In fact, the “choice” has already been made. Kevin Rudd was ousted as prime minister in June 2010, in large part because his proposals to defuse tensions between the US and China cut across Washington’s agenda. US “assets” within the Labor Party helped orchestrate the coup, and Rudd’s replacement, Julia Gillard, subsequently committed Labor unequivocally to the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia”—an aggressive offensive to undermine China on all fronts, diplomatically, economically and strategically.

In a move that spoke volumes about the slavish relationship between former Prime Minister Gillard and her supporters in Washington, she provided the Australian parliament, without any public discussion or debate, as a platform for President Obama to formally announce his “pivot” in November 2011. Gillard then signed an agreement to allow the basing of US Marines in Darwin and gave undertakings, which have never been divulged, to provide US warships and planes access to other Australian bases. Rudd’s own silence

on these matters since he ousted Gillard in June, and indeed on any foreign policy issue, makes clear he will likewise acquiesce to the US military build-up in Australia.

Far from managing its relations with China peacefully, as Carr and Bishop claimed, Washington is intent on maintaining its global hegemony at the direct expense of Beijing. To this end, it is currently “rebalancing” 60 percent of its naval and air force assets to the Indo-Pacific, while the Pentagon is establishing a string of new basing arrangements throughout the region. There can be no other explanation but that these initiatives are aimed at encircling China and preparing for war.

Both politicians’ claims that economic integration between the US and China will prevent war are designed to cultivate a false sense of security. It should be recalled that similar sentiments were expressed exactly one hundred years ago, regarding the economic interdependence of the various European powers, on the very eve of the eruption of World War I. Over the past 30 years, the globalisation of production has only heightened, not lessened, tensions between the US and its rivals in Asia and Europe. China’s economic rise and demand for energy and resources threatens to undermine the role of the US in Africa, the Middle East, and throughout the world. Amid the worst economic crisis of global capitalism since the 1930s, US imperialism is determined to use its military might, as it has already done in the Middle East and Central Asia, to offset its economic decline and thwart any challenges from China or any other power.

Moreover, Carr’s proposals for a peaceful resolution of the maritime disputes between China and Japan, the Philippines and Vietnam in the South China and East China Seas through “resource-sharing”, assume that China is the aggressor. In reality, the US has been actively encouraging China’s rivals and fomenting disagreements, and in the process transforming relatively minor regional disagreements into dangerous flashpoints that have the potential to drag the world, once again, into a catastrophic war. Washington has been deliberately stoking these frictions as a pretext for arming its allies and building up the US naval presence in sensitive waters adjacent to the Chinese mainland.

Throughout the Socialist Equality Party’s (SEP) intervention into the 2013 election campaign, our

Senate candidates in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia have fought to break the wall of silence surrounding the Australian government’s involvement in these war preparations and to alert workers and young people as to their consequences. The working class itself must demand answers to the following questions: What is the real purpose of the numerous American military facilities across the country? What activities are they engaged in right now? What new US bases have been agreed to? What secret commitments has the Labor government made to a US war with China?

The SEP’s election campaign is part of a wider international campaign being conducted by the world Trotskyist movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International, to build a new global anti-war movement based on the only social force capable of preventing another disastrous world war—the international working class. Such a movement can only be developed on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program, aimed at abolishing the root cause of war—the capitalist profit system. I urge those who agree with this perspective to support and participate in our election campaign to the fullest extent possible.

Authorised by Nick Beams, 113/55 Flemington Rd, North Melbourne VIC 3051



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