

Australia: Clive Palmer advised on the civil way to demonise China

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Last week, mining billionaire and member of parliament Clive Palmer was widely condemned by Australian politicians and media commentators for declaring on national television that he was “standing up against the Chinese bastards” because “they’re Communist, they shoot their own people, they haven’t got a justice system and they want to take over this country.” Jacqui Lambie, a senator for the Palmer United Party (PUP), went further, declaring that Australia had to militarily prepare for the “threat of a Chinese communist invasion” and that “the Communist Chinese government [and] military have an aggressive attitude.”

The language employed to criticise Palmer and Lambie was highly revealing. No one in the political and media establishment denounced them on the grounds that it was absurd to present China as a military threat to Australia. Instead, the term widely used to describe their remarks was that they were “unhelpful,” given that China is currently Australia’s largest trading partner and export market, as well as the source of significant investment.

Trade minister Andrew Robb, for example, who is negotiating a free trade agreement with China, labelled Palmer’s comments as “extraordinarily unhelpful” because they could be “misinterpreted.” Prime Minister Tony Abbott said that Palmer’s remarks were “over-the-top, shrill and wrong,” adding that they were “simplistic and counterproductive.” Immigration minister Scott Morrison declared: “I wish he [Palmer] hadn’t said them.”

Bill Shorten, the leader of the opposition Labor Party which in government fully committed Australia to the US “pivot” against China in Asia and signed off on the establishment of new American military bases in the country, labelled Palmer’s outburst as “not helpful at

all.”

For all the sound and fury against Palmer, the reality is that the US pivot and Washington’s confrontational and provocative policies in Asia have, from the beginning, been justified by denouncing China as a danger and a country that represses its population. Announcing the pivot on the floor of the Australian parliament on November 17, 2011, President Barack Obama declared the US was building up its military forces in the region to “project power and deter threats to peace” and insisted on China “upholding international norms and respecting the universal human rights of the Chinese people.”

The Australian government’s 2013 Defence White Paper openly stated that Australia might need “to conduct conventional combat operations to counter aggression or coercion against our partners,” which analysts noted at the time was a guarded reference to joining the US and Japan in war with China.

Political commentators in Australia regularly compare China today with Germany in 1914, on the eve of World War I, labelling both as aggressive, expansionist powers attempting to challenge long established international relations and therefore responsible for the danger of war. The same comparison was used by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in January to justify Japanese remilitarisation. Abe declared Japan today was the equivalent of Britain in 1914, threatened by an expansionist China.

The “unhelpful” mistake made by the PUP’s Palmer and Lambie was that they stated too crudely the propaganda conceptions that are being cultivated to justify Australia’s central participation in US-led preparations for conflict with China. Last November, for example, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop denounced

China's declaration of an Air Defence Identification Zone over waters and disputed islands in the East China Sea as a "unilateral and coercive action." The Abbott government has unambiguously signalled that in the event of a clash between China and Japan, it will join the United States in going to war with Beijing alongside Tokyo.

That Palmer and Lambie said nothing that has not been implied by a host of politicians and commentators was essentially admitted in the August 21 editorial of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. The newspaper wrote: "If he [Palmer] and Senator Jacqui Lambie believe they are simply expanding on what Ms Bishop said about Chinese expansion in the Asia-Pacific... then they should argue the case in the context of tensions between Japan and China."

In other words, condemning China as a military threat is legitimate, but not with xenophobic anti-Asian language that harks back to the White Australia policy and the Cold War propaganda that Australia was threatened by the "yellow" Communist peril to the north. Palmer and the PUP, the *Sydney Morning Herald* declared, failed the "civility test." The demonisation of China, the newspaper is advising Palmer, has to proceed at this point according to Washington's script that Beijing challenges "international law" and violates human rights, not wild assertions that Australia faces the prospect of invasion.



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