

Australian election: Another Labor war-monger runs for parliament

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The Australian Labor Party's selection of Peter Khalil as its election candidate in the Melbourne electorate of Wills is another expression of Labor's function as the most pro-US and pro-war parliamentary faction.

The official election campaign has seen a blanket exclusion of any discussion of the escalating war danger in the Asia-Pacific, as US imperialism steps up its confrontation with China in the South China Sea and other flashpoints. Within military and foreign policy circles in both Canberra and Washington, however, it is understood that a change in government at the election could result in a more aggressive Australian stance. Labor Party defence spokesman Stephen Conroy has repeatedly denounced the Liberal-National government of Malcolm Turnbull for failing to authorise an Australian military deployment within Chinese-claimed territorial waters in the South China Sea.

If elected on July 2, Khalil will be another voice within the Labor parliamentary caucus agitating for a confrontation with Beijing.

Khalil has powerful allies within the Labor Party, including opposition leader Bill Shorten, who backed him in the inner-party pre-selection contest to replace retiring parliamentarian for Wills, Kelvin Thomson. Wills is regarded as one of Labor's "bell weather" seats, and was formerly held by Prime Minister Bob Hawke. Khalil won pre-selection after being backed by the Australian Workers Union faction, and was endorsed by the Labor "left" in accordance with a "stability pact" between Labor's rival factions in Victoria.

Khalil is well known within Washington foreign policy, military, and diplomatic circles.

In 2003, shortly after the US-led illegal invasion of Iraq, in which Australia joined the "coalition of the

willing," Khalil was working as an analyst within the Department of Defence in Canberra. He was deployed to Baghdad to work with the US occupation regime, serving for nine months as the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) director of national security policy.

Khalil (of Egyptian Coptic background) used his knowledge of the Arabic language to assist the American occupiers. A brief biography later published by the Brookings Institution gives some sense of what Khalil did in this period:

"He was responsible for developing coalition strategy and policies for rebuilding the Iraqi security forces and institutions, facilitating the reintegration of militias, and establishing the national command authorities of the Iraqi interim government. Khalil regularly met with and briefed Ambassador Paul Bremer, the head of the CPA, as well as numerous coalition military commanders. He also served as the CPA security representative on the Iraqi Governing Council's National Security Committee, working closely with Prime Minister Iyad Allawi. His work involved travel across Iraq to consult and negotiate with the representatives of major Iraqi political parties, militia commanders, tribal sheikhs, religious leaders, and regional governors."

In other words, Khalil worked to bolster the position of the US military authorities and their Iraqi stooges, while helping suppress Iraqi resistance to the occupation.

After serving in Baghdad, Khalil continued to agitate for aggressive US operations aimed at establishing control over the devastated country. He was appointed a "visiting scholar" by the Brookings Institution in October 2004 and made multiple media appearances during his time in Washington, also testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

On November 8, 2004 he was interviewed on CNN

just as the US military launched a renewed offensive against the Iraqi city of Fallujah. In April 2004, US forces had made a humiliating withdrawal from the city, after encountering fierce resistance from the local population. The November assault, dubbed Operation Phantom Fury, was a major war crime, with 10,000 US troops backed by fighter jets subjecting the city's people to a ruthless collective punishment. Much of Fallujah was levelled, and thousands of civilians were killed.

In his CNN interview, Khalil provided an upbeat assessment of the situation, declaring that divisions among the “insurgents” represented “some good news for the US troops going in.” He added that reports of US Marines preparing for casualties in their own ranks was also “good news” because it indicated that they were prepared “to be going through Fallujah, house by house, block by block, to flush out the insurgents, to flush out the terrorists.”

In December 2004, Khalil authored an op-ed piece for the *New York Times*, again denouncing those fighting the US-led occupation as comprising a “relatively small number of Saddam Hussein loyalists, religious extremists and foreign terrorists.” He argued for the formation of a special Iraqi-proxy force of 25,000 “mobile counterterrorism units, light-infantry police battalions and SWAT teams” that would operate “at the pointy end of the spear.”

When he returned to Australia, Khalil was appointed as one of Labor leader Kevin Rudd's advisers, shortly before Rudd was elected prime minister in 2007. A US diplomatic cable from April that year, later published by WikiLeaks, reported that Khalil assured embassy officials that Rudd, then opposition leader, was “committed to a close relationship with the United States.”

The WikiLeaks cables also show that by 2009, after finishing his stint as a Rudd adviser, Khalil was a “protected source” of the US embassy in Canberra, that is, one of Washington's many secret informants within the Labor Party.

In September 2010, amid a debate within the Australian foreign establishment over how to respond to growing tensions between the US and China, Khalil weighed in to denounce any deviation from total support for Washington. In a statement co-authored with Michael Danby, a pro-Zionist Labor

parliamentarian, and Carl Ungerer of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Khalil denounced as “appeasement” any attempt to recognise Beijing's growing geostrategic influence in the region. The article, published in Murdoch's *Australian* newspaper, declared that bowing “to Beijing would be the modern equivalent of the Munich agreement.”

Describing China as a “totalitarian power that seeks to extend hegemony over its neighbourhood as a means of protecting itself,” Khalil and his co-authors demanded that Canberra “stay loyal to our friends in the region [and] assist the US to maintain its role in the region.” Anything else, he declared, amounted to “appeasement,” like the attempt by former British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain to placate Nazi Germany in the lead up to World War II.

Khalil did not spell out the logical conclusion of his argument—that in the name of stopping alleged Chinese expansionism, the US and its allies ought to prepare to launch World War III.

Nevertheless, this is nevertheless what US imperialism is preparing to do, with the backing of the Australian Labor Party. Khalil's record is a further warning of this. In the final analysis, his selection for parliament is a reflection of Labor's long-standing role as the Australian ruling class's most determined and ruthless political instrument of militarism and war.

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