

Intelligence agencies reportedly question Australian PM's "stance" on China

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A media-driven campaign is underway in Australia to bring the political establishment fully into line with the advanced preparations for Australian involvement in US-led military actions against China. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull is the latest target.

In a remarkable article published on Saturday, the *Australian Financial Review* (AFR) asserted that the country's intelligence agencies do not trust Turnbull because of his past business relations in China and his comments in 2011 disputing that China was a security threat to the US and Australia.

The weekend AFR featured a total of 11 separate articles and comments, including its editorial, which, in differing ways, all alleged that China constitutes a danger to Australian interests. The article on Turnbull was headlined "PM's stance on China worries experts."

The AFR's focus on Turnbull follows its revelation last week that Labor Party Senator Sam Dastyari asked a Chinese company to pay a personal debt of \$1,670. The senator's financial relations with Chinese sources were directly linked by the newspaper to statements he made in June 2016 that Australia should remain "neutral" on the territorial conflicts between China and other countries in the South China Sea.

In parliament last Wednesday, a government MP branded Dastyari as a "Manchurian candidate"—that is, a Chinese agent. On Friday, in a radio interview, Turnbull accused Dastyari of taking "cash for comment."

Barely 24 hours later, it was Turnbull being implicitly labelled as a possible "Manchurian candidate."

The AFR wrote that the intelligence agencies believed the prime minister "isn't taking their warnings about the security threat posed by China seriously enough." China, the article alleged, "has a well-

resourced effort that uses cyber-espionage and human agents to steal Australian commercial secrets and obtain sensitive government information."

After referencing Turnbull's past Chinese business connections, the AFR declared: "Intelligence leaders are conscious Mr Turnbull predicted five years ago that China would not use the expansion of its navy to become more militarily assertive and opposed the Labor government's strategy of preparing for a naval war in the South China Sea, where China is now turning islets into bases."

An unnamed contractor, allegedly "with close links to the intelligence services," told the AFR: "There is still a lot of cynicism among senior officials about him [Turnbull]." The contractor asserted: "He is probably the first time since Whitlam where we have had a prime minister where we don't know where he stands on national security grounds."

The reference to Whitlam can be interpreted only as a direct threat to Turnbull's position. The Labor government headed by Prime Minister Gough Whitlam was removed from power on November 11, 1975, in an anti-democratic constitutional coup involving the governor-general, the opposition parties and the intelligence agencies of Australia, Britain and the US.

The main motive behind the coup was the alarm in the political establishment over the Labor government's inability to control an explosive movement in the Australian working class for wage rises and social reforms and against militarism. In Washington, concerns existed that Whitlam might adapt to the popular opposition to the US-Australia alliance that developed during the Vietnam War and order the closure of the key US spy base at Pine Gap in central Australia.

More recently, Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd

was ousted by his own party in an overnight factional coup on June 24, 2010. US diplomatic cables were later published by WikiLeaks showing that the Obama administration had viewed Rudd as not fully aligned with its plans to undermine and push back Chinese influence in Asia.

The key Labor and trade union powerbrokers who organised Rudd's removal were named in the diplomatic cables as "protected sources" of the US embassy. Underscoring the American hand in Rudd's ousting, his replacement, Julia Gillard, in 2011 fully aligned Australia with Obama's "pivot to Asia" and granted new basing and access arrangements to assist in the concentration of 60 percent of the US Navy and Air Force in the region.

The AFR has raised a question mark over Turnbull's allegiance to the US alliance and anti-China agenda under conditions in which he holds office by a thread.

Turnbull's Liberal-National Coalition won only a one-seat majority in the July 2 election. Just a handful of desertions to Labor would see power change on the floor of parliament. Within the Liberal Party, Turnbull faces factional opposition from supporters of former Prime Minister Tony Abbott, whom Turnbull ousted in September 2015. Since the election, Abbott has sent ample signals that is he waiting for an opportunity to retake the Liberal leadership and the post of prime minister.

Turnbull is currently in China for the G20 summit. He will then attend the East Asia Forum in Laos. His every statement on China and the South China Sea disputes is being scrutinised closely for any hint that he is attempting to distance Australia from US policy, due to its economic reliance on China as its largest trading partner.

Turnbull's brief meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping on Sunday has so far been interpreted as sufficiently in line with the US stance. He raised Australian "concern" about Chinese activities in the South China Sea and warned Xi that American "military superiority cannot be overtaken."

The White House and the Pentagon military-intelligence apparatus, however, want far more than words from the Australian government. US military figures have made repeated calls for Australia to publicly challenge Chinese maritime claims in the South China Sea by sending naval forces to carry out a

"freedom of navigation" operation (FONOP) inside the 12-mile territorial zones surrounding Chinese-held islets. Colonel Tom Hanson, the assistant chief of staff of the US Army, made the latest demand just last week.

The US has already conducted three FONOP provocations. It wants Australia to undertake an operation to demonstrate that Washington is not alone in challenging China. The Labor Party opposition has echoed the US position and demanded that Turnbull order such a military deployment. Within the Coalition government, Abbott has gone on record to support an Australian-led operation.

The last US FONOP took place in May. The head of US Pacific Command (PACOM), Admiral Harry Harris, stated that he wanted an operation undertaken at least once every three months, meaning the next one is well overdue.

Through the Chinese state-owned media, the Beijing regime is continuing to signal that it will respond aggressively to any Australian-led operation. A September 2 editorial by the English language *Global Times* concluded: "China does not have to care about Canberra's provocative words. But if it resorts to real actions to hurt China's security such as sending warships to the South China Sea, it is bound to pay a heavy price."

The increasing focus in the Australian media on Chinese spying and buying of political influence is a sinister ideological campaign to poison public opinion against China under conditions of a steady descent toward confrontation and war.



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