

Australia: Ex-general agitates for stepped-up war preparations

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6 January 2018

Retired Major General Jim Molan is currently being promoted by the Murdoch media, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and other media outlets in order to emphasise the purported “need” for a massive increase in military spending and in the combat readiness of the armed forces and their supply chains.

Molan spent 40 years in the Australian Army. In 2004, a particularly bloody year in the US occupation of Iraq, he served as a commander in the main military operational command centre in Baghdad, working to integrate the Australian and US armed forces ever more closely. Since retiring, he has established himself as one of the most prominent media advocates for the US-Australia military alliance.

In the 2016 federal elections, Molan stood as part of the Liberal Party Senate slate, but was too far down on the list to be elected. He is now entering parliament as the replacement for Senator Fiona Nash, who was ousted by the High Court due to her dual citizenship with the United Kingdom.

In an opinion piece published by the Rupert Murdoch-owned *Australian* on January 3, the ex-general gave one over-riding justification for his call for a military build-up: the decline of “American power.” Molan catalogued what he labelled the deficiencies of the US Army, Navy and Air Force, and raised doubts as to the ability of the United States to win a war with North Korea or Iran, let alone with Russia or China.

Australian imperialism, he insisted, therefore had “strong grounds to question” its “expectation” that the US would, or could, come to its assistance in the event of an “extreme scenario”—that is, a major war. Australia, while “remaining the staunchest of US allies,” had to be able to “defend its national interests independently.”

Molan concluded: “The best allies are highly self-reliant and Australia is one of the best of America’s plethora of allies.”

The ex-general did not name what country or countries he believed could threaten Australia with an “extreme scenario.” This is, in no small part, due to the fact that what is being prepared is not the “defence” of Australia, but its involvement in offensive, US-led wars, far from the country’s shores. The necessity for developing a “self-reliant” Australia is the pretext for expanding the military, and making a greater contribution to the operations of its American ally.

The *Australian* made this clear in its January 5 editorial, which endorsed Molan’s views. It named “China’s unrelenting militarism in the South China Sea and tension on the Korean peninsula” as the two most immediate potential triggers for drawing Australia into war.

It is now more than six years since Australia, under the Labor government of Julia Gillard, extended unconditional support to the anti-China “pivot to Asia,” initiated by the Obama administration in November 2011. At the diplomatic level, both the Labor government and the Liberal-National Coalition government that replaced it in 2013, have sided with Washington at every point as it ratchets up tensions with Beijing over territorial disputes in the South China Sea, and through US threats to attack North Korea if its regime fails to abandon its weapons programs.

US military use of Australian air bases, ports and training facilities has been dramatically increased, as have joint exercises between American and Australian forces. The Australian military operates as the adjunct of its far larger American partner. The Australian continent—and particularly a string of bases in the country’s north—is openly described in US strategic documents as an American military “sanctuary” in the event of a major war in the Asia-Pacific region.

Canberra’s alignment with the US against China, Australia’s largest export market and trading partner, is

the source of continuous friction and conflict within the Australian ruling class and its political establishment. However, the layer most preoccupied with the potential losses that Australian business interests could suffer, has been largely marginalised. The US is the guarantor of Australian strategic influence in Asia and around the world. Moreover, American corporations dominate the domestic economy and are the largest source of foreign investment, while Australian companies and the ultra-rich have poured hundreds of billions of dollars into US assets and stocks.

Rupert Murdoch, the ex-Australian billionaire, now US citizen and American-based media magnate, personifies this corporate relationship. For its part, the military relationship is constantly being reinforced through the virtual integration of the Australian armed forces, intelligence services and strategic think tanks with their American counterparts.

US politicians and military commanders have repeatedly implored Australian imperialism—considered in Washington to be one of its most reliable and compliant partners—to contribute far more to the joint preparations for a confrontation with China.

To that end, Molan is calling for greater military spending, and the stockpiling of fuel and “high-end weapons,” such as missiles for aircraft and ships, to enable the armed forces to fight a protracted war. He also advocates that Australia should seek “more stable security guarantees”—an implicit call for military alliances with countries other than the United States, so they can also be drawn into any conflict with China.

The *Australian* backs such a policy. It praised the steps toward the formation of a “Quadrilateral” military relationship between the US, Japan, India and Australia, and advocated the forging of formal anti-China security alliances with “other regional democracies such as India, Japan and South Korea.”

As part of its commitment to stand with the US in a conflict with China, Australian imperialism is already undertaking a multi-billion dollar spending spree to acquire state-of-the-art ships, aircraft, and other military materiel. These include F-35 fighters, sophisticated naval frigates, and a \$50 billion project to construct 12 conventional attack submarines.

Some \$495 billion is slated to be squandered on defence between 2016 and 2026. To fulfill Molan’s agenda of “self-reliance”—which, concretely, means a huge expansion in both the size and capability of the armed forces—would require this sum to be vastly increased.

Australian editorial supported such an increase unfavourably comparing the level of Australian military spending, at 2 percent of GDP, with the 3.5 percent being spent in the US. It also implied that increasing the current defence outlay of some \$30 billion would require cuts to the \$164 billion spent each year on social security, involving slashing the retirement pension and welfare benefits.

Under conditions where every national state is competing to attract investment by slashing taxes on corporations and the ultra-wealthy, the parallel preparations for war can only be financed through the further destruction of the living standards and social conditions of the working class.

Moreover, while neither Molan nor the *Australian* editorial raised the question, enlisting the required personnel for a major expansion of the armed forces would, more than likely, lead to the re-introduction of some form of compulsory military service, which was last introduced in Australia between 1964 and 1971 to conscript young men to fight and die in the Vietnam War.

The entire political establishment, which uniformly supports the war preparations, is nevertheless aware of the lack of any popular support for increased military spending at the expense of social services. That is why such concerted efforts are being made to develop a constituency for militarism, through the stoking of nationalism, patriotism and, above all, paranoia about alleged Chinese “influence” over Australian politics, universities and corporations.

Molan’s comments and the *Australian* editorial represent yet another component of the whipping up of anti-China propaganda. Like the “Red Peril” hysteria in the 1960s, aimed at justifying the US alliance at the time and Canberra’s complicity in the Vietnam War, the allocation of further social resources to the military will be increasingly justified on the basis that “sacrifices” on the part of “every citizen” are necessary to avoid a “foreign” invasion and even conquest.



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