

Ex-general delivers first speech in parliament: Australia must “consider the next war”

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Jim Molan, who retired from the Australian Army in 2008 with the rank of major-general, assumed a seat this week in the Senate, the upper house of the Australian parliament, representing the Liberal Party. He used his maiden speech on Wednesday to insist that Australia must prepare for a potential war with China.

Molan’s political elevation is one of the outcomes of the reactionary witch-hunt to purge “dual citizens” from the parliament on the grounds they could not have “unqualified allegiance to Australia.”

In the July 2016 election, he was placed as number seven on the slate of candidates stood by the Liberal and National parties for the 12 Senate seats elected in the state of New South Wales. The slate only secured sufficient votes to win five.

In October 2017, National Party deputy leader Fiona Nash was removed by the High Court because she inherited citizenship in the United Kingdom through her father. The court then disqualified the sixth person on the slate, Hollie Hughes, deeming her ineligible as she had taken a public service position after the election. Molan was next in line.

The ex-general is a militarist and extreme nationalist. He boasts of his service as a top-level operational commander in the headquarters of the US military in Iraq during 2004–2005, when masses of Iraqis rose up against the occupation and were savagely repressed in cities such as Fallujah, Ramadi, Tal Afar, Karbala, Najaf and Basra, as well as in the working-class suburbs of Baghdad. Among the many American commanders with whom he worked in Iraq is the current US secretary of defense, ex-marine general Jim “Mad Dog” Mattis.

After leaving the army, Molan became a frequent media commentator. In 2009, he agitated for the deployment of up to 6,000 Australian infantry and

support troops to the war in Afghanistan, so they could be “blooded.”

In 2013, he was appointed by the Coalition government of Prime Minister Tony Abbott to draw up Operation Sovereign Borders, involving illegal and secretive Australian naval operations to turn back refugee boats. Unknown numbers of desperate people have lost their lives as a result.

The ex-general has brought these reactionary credentials into the parliament and a definite standpoint on what needs to be done to defend the interests of the financial and corporate elite. The United States, he has repeatedly opined, has declined so much as a world power that the Australian capitalist class cannot rely on it as economic and military competition escalates with China over dominance in the Asia-Pacific.

“My view,” he told the Senate, “is that we need to increase our self-reliance to manage strategic uncertainty through increased readiness, preparedness and all-round adaptability. Once before, in the decades up to 1941, Australia blindly put its security in the hands of an old friend, with a resulting situation that almost did not end well for us.”

He continued: “[A]n ascendant power, China, is challenging a status quo power, the US, in our region.” Molan asserted that, while “war with China or involving China is not inevitable,” war had been the outcome of 12 out of 16 alleged historical cases since the 1500s of conflict between “status quo” and “rising” powers.

The question, he declared, was “how Australia is going to deter the next war by being able to win it.” Governments had to “state what they consider the next war is going to be” and prepare for it.

In 1941–1942, as British forces in Asia collapsed in the face of a Japanese advance, the Australian

government pushed military spending to 23.4 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), then to 34 percent the following year, in the name of achieving “self-reliance.” Wholesale conscription was introduced in mid-1942, with all males aged 18-35 and all single males aged 35–45 enlisted into the armed forces. Strikes and industrial action by workers was banned and suppressed where it developed. The Trotskyist movement—the only political organisation that opposed Australian imperialism—was illegalised.

Molan’s positions move inexorably in similar directions. The question needs only be posed: how will the strategists of Australian imperialism—a nation-state with a population of 25 million, active armed forces of barely 60,000 and a GDP of \$US1.2 trillion—propose to “deter” China, with a population of 1.4 billion, a 2.3 million-strong military, a GDP of at least \$US11.2 trillion and nuclear weapons?

Immediately, Molan and the wing of the political and military establishment for which he speaks want military spending dramatically ramped up. To pay for that would require even more savage cutbacks to social spending on health, education, aged pensions and welfare.

Ominously, a discussion has re-emerged on Australia acquiring its own nuclear weapons’ arsenal (see: “Renewed push for Australia to build nuclear weapons”).

Legislation has been introduced into the parliament that can be used to criminalise political opposition to the militarist stance of Australia and the US against China (see: “Australian government unveils draconian ‘foreign interference’ bills”). A pall of suspicion has been cast over 1.2 million Australians of Chinese background and thousands of Chinese students and workers temporarily in Australia. They have been effectively labelled in government security documents and the mass media as a possible pro-Beijing fifth column. In the event of hostilities, the Australian state would establish mass internment camps of “aliens,” as it did during World War I and II.

Molan concluded his Senate speech by expressing his concern over the “level of legal migration,” asserting it was “in excess of the capacity of our cities to absorb, both culturally and in terms of infrastructure.” The ex-general has left little doubt as to his antagonism toward Muslim immigration, sharing on his Facebook page

racist videos produced by the ultra-right Britain First organisation. China, however, is now one of the largest sources of migration to Australia.

The ex-general does not consider his call for “self-reliance” to be at odds with the continuation of the closest possible military and strategic alliance with US imperialism. Instead, he considers it to be the best way to reassure Washington that Australia is a dependable and capable ally in potential coming wars with North Korea and, ultimately, China. With the backing of sections of the media, he will aggressively push his views.

One suspects that the new senator will be a frequent and welcome guest at the US embassy, when the new ambassador, anti-China hawk Admiral Harry Harris, arrives to take up his position.

The author recommends:

Trump nominates anti-China hawk as US ambassador to Australia

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