

Australian prime minister elevates pro-US militarists to top cabinet, intelligence positions

James Cogan
20 August 2019

Prime Minister Scott Morrison has further signalled his government's determination to maintain Australia's close alignment with the United States, as Washington's steadily escalating political and economic confrontation with China heightens the danger of a catastrophic war. He has selected Andrew Shearer, one of the most vocal pro-US, anti-China figures in the Australian strategic establishment, to take over the post of cabinet secretary next month.

Shearer will take part in regular meetings of the cabinet, the Expenditure Review Committee responsible for the federal budget and the National Security Committee, which largely decides on foreign policy and has sweeping executive powers to order military deployments overseas and within Australia.

The extent of Shearer's connections and influence within the broader Australian-US strategic-military-intelligence apparatus are significant and well-known.

Over the past two decades, Shearer has served as a policy advisor to the defence minister during the high point of Australian involvement in the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. He was foreign policy and national security advisor to Prime Minister John Howard; director of studies at the Canberra-based Lowy Institute for International Policy; and national security advisor to Prime Minister Tony Abbott from 2013 to 2015.

Most recently, Shearer worked as a senior advisor at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) from 2016-2018 and, for the past year, as deputy director-general of the Office of National Intelligence (ONI)—the intelligence agency that reports directly to the prime minister.

The “advice” that he will give Morrison and the cabinet are also not a mystery. His views have been expressed in dozens of reports, documents, articles and

speeches.

Shearer is an ardent supporter of the US-Australia military alliance. He considers China's rise as an economic power as an existential threat to US geo-strategic dominance and Australian imperialist interests in the Indo-Pacific region. He refers, as many such analysts do, to post-World War II global hegemony of the United States as the “rules-based international order.”

To contain and suppress the purported challenge posed by China, he has been a particularly vocal proponent of establishing the “Quadrilateral”—a de-facto military alliance involving Japan and India, as well as the US.

Shearer endorsed the allocation of tens of billions of dollars by previous Labor and Coalition governments to acquire new submarines, F-35 jet fighters and other war-fighting assets for the Australian military, while advocating that even more be spent.

In 2016, he joined calls for a major expansion of the Western Australian naval port of Stirling so it could function as a permanent home base for US surface warships. Some analysts suggested an entire aircraft carrier battle group should operate from the site as it would enhance the US ability to rapidly project naval power into the Indian Ocean.

Shearer added the possibility that the government could invest “in the nuclear support infrastructure necessary for the basing of [US] attack submarines” at Stirling—that is, develop a significant domestic nuclear power industry capable of maintaining and providing fuel for nuclear reactors.

In 2017, he publicly called for Australia to actively participate in the US “missile defense shield” and deploy the equivalent of the US “Terminal High Altitude Area Defense” (THAAD) system already

installed in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, American Pacific territories and South Korea.

In recent years, Shearer has also been at the forefront of demanding action against Chinese influence over Pacific Island nations and backing the campaign against Beijing's alleged "interference" in Australian politics, business and society.

Shearer, on a number of occasions, has indirectly pointed to the motive behind the steadily rising hysteria over the past several years about Chinese influence in Australia. An article he co-authored in May 2017, for example, stated: "[M]ost important of all is the need to renew the Australian public's understanding of the essentiality of our [US] alliance to the open and stable order we all enjoy in the Pacific."

That is, within the strategic establishment, the concerted propaganda efforts maintaining that Australia is threatened by Chinese "expansionism," "totalitarianism" and "interference" has been aimed at combating the widespread popular opposition to militarism and American-led wars, and related concern about the US alliance. It is a textbook campaign to conjure up an "external enemy," to justify American bases, ongoing increases in military expenditure and operations, rampant domestic spying on anti-war activity and sweeping attacks on freedom of speech, association and assembly.

Shearer's role, it can be predicted, will be to advise the ruling Liberal-National Coalition on how to publicly promote the US-led preparations for war with China. He will direct the government to disregard public concerns and fears, while slandering active opposition and supporting its suppression on the false pretext that it stems from "Chinese interference."

A second appointment this month by Morrison also portends stepped-up state repression, using the draconian powers contained in the "foreign interference" laws that were rammed through parliament last year by the Coalition government with the support of the Labor Party opposition.

Mike Burgess, the current head of the Australian Signals Directorate (ASD) spy agency, has been named as the incoming director of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO)—the main intelligence arm responsible for so-called domestic security.

With some 2,000 personnel and an annual budget of over \$530 million, ASIO's brief is to monitor and

suppress alleged espionage, foreign interference and terrorism. It regularly proscribes persons from entering Australia on "national security" grounds. The agency has extensive powers to spy on Australian individuals and organisations. It can secretly detain people for seven days without charge to subject them to interrogation and can seek repeated extensions of the detention.

Burgess is one of the intelligence hawks against purported Chinese "interference" and "influence." In August 2018, as head of the ASD, he reportedly applied considerable pressure on then Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to ban the Chinese telecommunications corporation Huawei from participation in Australia's 5G network.

Turnbull, who as prime minister had always fallen into line with the dictates of the US and Australian military-intelligence apparatus, was nevertheless viewed as insufficiently hard-line on China. He was ousted just days after the Huawei ban in a political coup orchestrated by the most pro-US faction of the Liberal Party led by former prime minister Tony Abbott and Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton. Morrison was installed as his replacement.

The Socialist Equality Party commented on the WSWS after Morrison appointed his new cabinet: "In the final analysis, the move against Turnbull is part of a conscious and ongoing campaign to refashion the Liberal Party into one prepared to confront and ride rough-shod over both the working class and those sections of the corporate and financial elites that oppose confrontation with China."

This month's appointments of Shearer and Burgess verify that assessment.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact