

Former Australian spy chief steps up anti-China campaign

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The former head of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), Duncan Lewis, has issued a lurid denunciation of China, claiming Beijing is seeking to “take over” Australia’s political system.

The assertions were featured in the lead article of today’s *Sydney Morning Herald*, under the sensationalist headline “China seeks to rule us: ex-ASIO chief.”

The article was based on an interview given by Lewis, who retired as the ASIO chief in September, to the newspaper’s international editor Peter Hartcher.

After stoking paranoia over a purported Chinese “threat,” Lewis called on members of the Chinese community to be recruited to assist the security agencies in the same way people in Islamic communities had been enlisted to inform on alleged “terrorist” risks. In other words, he advocated the establishment of a system of informants and spies along the lines of the East German Stasi.

Chinese authorities, he claimed, were targeting politicians and were working to influence social, business and media circles.

In language recalling the anti-communist rhetoric of the Cold War, and the vast spying operations with which ASIO is synonymous, Lewis said: “Espionage and foreign interference is insidious. Its effects might not be present for decades and by that time it’s too late. You wake up one day and find decisions made in our country are not in the interests of our country. Not only in politics but also in the community or in business. It takes over, basically, pulling the strings from offshore.”

As a description of the operations of the Australian political system, and particularly the determination of the foreign policy orientation of Australian governments, whether Liberal or Labor, Lewis’ remarks most accurately describe the role of the United

States.

The main conduit for this is the military and intelligence apparatuses. Earlier this week, former Prime Minister Paul Keating told an event organised by the Australian Strategic Forum that the “subtleties” of foreign policy and the “elasticity” of diplomacy were being supplanted “by the phobias of a group of security agencies which are now effectively running the foreign policy of the country.”

Keating attacked the establishment media, singling out the Channel Nine-owned group (formerly Fairfax), the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Melbourne Age*, for being “up to its ears” in promoting “shock-and-awe” anti-China hysteria.

Four days later, as if on cue, the *Herald* featured the interview with Lewis, who said covert foreign interference is “something we need to the very, very careful about.”

Keating recalled his own experience of being politically pressured and prevailed upon to line up with the positions of the United States—a matter on which he was silent about during his decades as a stalwart member of the pro-US Labor right-wing faction.

In 1971, he said, two years after being elected to parliament, the State Department organised for him to make a six-week visit to the US. He stated in his speech: “No trifling things like Chinese-language publications or pamphlets in Australian universities on that occasion—which the press here perpetually complain. No, for the Americans, it was straight through the door to get a grip on you.”

At the time, he noted, the US was “manoeuvring with the CIA to bring on a military coup to remove its president Salvador Allende”—an action carried out in September 1973.

Keating said not since the days of the Roman Empire

had power been so concentrated in one state—the US—and that “imperial decay” invariably flowed from the “misuse” of such power. He cited the “extension of NATO to the very borders of Russia” and the “unprovoked attack on Iraq” as examples. “Then from the mists of imperial grandeur,” he continued, “China popped up.”

Keating asserted that the US would have to “adjust to the reality of China.” The reality, however, is that US imperialism is seeking to mobilise all its strategic allies into an economic and military confrontation with Beijing, to prevent it ever emerging as a global challenge to American dominance.

Australia is at the forefront of these preparations, as the former ultra-right-wing and anti-China hawk Trump adviser, Steven Bannon, bluntly told the Australian Strategic Forum.

Reflecting the almost daily and ever more strident denunciations of China coming from key sections of the US intelligence establishment, Bannon said the world situation was akin to that of the 1930s. The right-wing demagogue took the Australian political establishment to task for not facing the population up to the fact that they face involvement in a “kinetic,” that is military, conflict with China.

“Australia has to understand they are at the absolute tip of the spear geo-strategically,” Bannon declared.

The danger of war was also highlighted this week by Henry Kissinger, the former secretary of state and national security adviser under President Nixon.

Having been at the centre of US foreign policy and all the crimes of US imperialism for half-a-century, Kissinger is acutely aware of the direction of the US orientation.

Speaking at a forum in Beijing organised by the Bloomberg organisation, he repeated warnings he made in New York last week. “If conflict is permitted to run unconstrained,” Kissinger said, “the outcome could be even worse than it was in Europe. World War I broke out because a relatively minor crisis could not be mastered.”

Any war between global nuclear powers in the 21st century would result in the devastation of the entire world, because the military balance, as Kissinger noted, had changed with the development of new technologies.

Under the policy of opening up relations with China,

which he devised largely as a means of countering the Soviet Union, Kissinger said the idea of China as a military threat was not seriously considered. But over the past three years, he said, there had been a “rapid” shift in the US orientation.

In his address to the Strategic Forum, Bannon said that if war did break out it would be in the South China Sea, where the US is provocatively intervening with “freedom of navigation” military challenges to Chinese territorial claims. In this context, the remarks at the same forum by Labor opposition defence spokesman Richard Marles are highly significant. Marles declared that, in regard to Australia joining with the US and undertaking operations in the South China Sea, he was more “hawkish” than the government.

Such statements underscore that the war drive of the US, acting through the intelligence and military agencies, and propagated by and unrelenting campaign in powerful media outlets, has strong support in key sections of the Australian political establishment.



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