

Australian defence minister launches “frank discussion” on war against China

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Nine Media newspapers, the *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald*, on Monday published an “exclusive interview” with recently-installed Defence Minister Peter Dutton, in which he vowed to conduct a “more frank discussion with the public” about the prospect of war against China.

Dutton’s front-page interview is part of a synchronised campaign by the Liberal-National government, and the political establishment as whole, to condition public opinion to prepare for what would be a catastrophic war involving nuclear weapons, launched by the US against China in order to reassert the global hegemony that American imperialism secured in World War II.

Dutton’s intervention shows that the political and military-intelligence elites, which are closely integrated with their US counterparts, are fully aware of definite US preparations for such a terrible war.

Declaring its intent to “win the 21st century,” the Biden administration has quickly ramped up Washington’s confrontation with China, which was initiated by the Obama administration and escalated under Trump, accusing Beijing of committing military aggression and human rights abuses throughout the Indo-Pacific.

Increasingly, these accusations have taken on the frenzied character of the “big lie” of “weapons of mass destruction” that became the pretext for the criminal and disastrous 2003 invasion of Iraq, through which the Bush administration and its allies, including Australia, sought to seize control of the strategic and resource-rich Middle East and Central Asia.

Dutton’s remarks betray concerns in ruling circles about the widespread anti-war sentiment in Australia, which was intensified by the Iraq invasion. As tens of millions of people worldwide rallied and marched against that illegal invasion, Australia saw some of the biggest protests of all, per capita.

Despite the largest-ever global anti-war demonstrations, however, the Bush White House, the Blair Labour government in the UK and the Howard Liberal-National government in Australia went ahead, laying waste to Iraq and causing the deaths of more than two million people.

Now the unindicted war criminals and their successors in Washington and allied governments are planning similar devastation, but on a much larger scale, in China and across the

Indo-Pacific.

Dutton was a member of the government in 2003, and became a government minister a year later. He said in his interview: “The views that matter to me are Australians who are living across cities, towns and suburbs across the country.” He claimed the public was “frankly ahead” of the “public debate” because of information available online.

If the population were actually already willing to support placing Australia on the frontline of a barbaric US-led war against China, there would be no need for the “frank discussion” that Dutton is seeking to launch.

In fact, a survey conducted last June by an Australian big business think tank, the Lowy Institute, cautioned that only a third of respondents agreed with Australian support for “military action in Asia, for example, in a conflict between China and Taiwan.” Just 40 percent agreed with the statement that “Australia should act in accordance with our security alliance with the United States if it means supporting military action in the Middle East, for example, against Iran.”

Elevated to defence minister by Prime Minister Scott Morrison in March amid a deepening series of government crises, Dutton has become increasingly prominent. In his interview, he declared that the country was “already under attack” via cyber warfare and boasted that the military was “ready for action”—even “tomorrow”—in the Indo-Pacific region after being engaged in Afghanistan for 20 years.

Last week, Dutton said a conflict over Taiwan, which historically is part of China, could not be “discounted.” Home Affairs secretary Michael Pezzullo, who has worked closely with Dutton, then declared the “drums of war” were beating in the region and said the country must be prepared “to send off, yet again, our warriors to fight,” as in World Wars I and II.

A day after publishing Dutton’s interview, the same newspaper outlets reported on a “candid and confidential briefing” of troops in April 2020 by Major-General Adam Findlay, who was then commander of Australia’s special forces, on the “high likelihood” of military conflict with China.

Findlay’s briefing indicated the level of war preparations that were already underway more than a year ago. “OK, so if China is a threat, how many special forces brigades in China? You should know there are 26,000 Chinese SOF [Special Operations

Forces] personnel,” the general told his elite commandos.

Findlay also said it was the first time since World War II that Australia faced a “peer enemy”—China. He said Australia’s special forces must deal with this challenge while simultaneously “going through hell” as a result of the military Inspector General’s much-delayed report last November, confirming that special forces units committed war crimes in Afghanistan.

The general’s briefing, given seven months before the war crimes report was officially released, foreshadowed the efforts being made by the political establishment to bury the evidence of civilian murders, torture and other atrocities perpetrated during the US-led Afghan war in order to prepare for new crimes.

Dutton and other government ministers are now making public the warnings of war that were being made within the military high command at least a year earlier.

Dutton and Assistant Defence Minister Andrew Hastie, a former special forces officer who was promoted into his post at the same time as Dutton, both recently made public statements that the military must move on from the war crimes scandal and focus on its “core business”—the “application of lethal violence.”

Another key figure, government Senator Jim Molan, a former chief of operations for coalition forces in occupied Iraq, joined the “frank discussion” on Monday. In an op-ed column published by the *Australian*, Molan further pointed to the accelerating preparations being made inside the military and political establishment for war.

“Many estimate that we have 3-5 years before conflict begins,” Molan wrote, echoing similar time frames given in March by the incoming and outgoing commanders of the US Indo-Pacific Command, admirals John Aquilino and Phil Davidson.

Molan also revealed anxiety about the public response. “Many ordinary Australians, not just those who have personally experienced global conflict, are awakening to the sombre reality that war is not just possible in our region, but likely,” he stated. He claimed that “complacency” could leave the country—and the “current crop of 18-19-year-olds” who would have to fight the war—unprepared for combat.

Molan referred to the underlying fight for global capitalist supremacy, while blaming China for it. “The second-most powerful nation (China) wants to overtake the most powerful nation (the US),” he wrote. “This has happened 16 times in the past 500 years and war has resulted on 12 of those occasions.”

Thus Molan—like Dutton and Findlay, and the Biden administration—depicted China as the aggressor, when it is the US that is militarily encircling China. It is also forging new quasi-military alliances against China, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad, involving the US, Japan, India and Australia, while maintaining the tariffs and economic sanctions imposed on China under Trump.

Molan agitated for far greater military spending and restructuring of the economy for war. He declared insufficient the Morrison government’s additional \$270 billion “investment” in military hardware over 10 years, which takes total planned military spending to around \$575 billion for the decade.

The Australian Defence Force could not “win a war,” he stated. It “will not be strong enough, big enough nor able to fight for long enough against a peer opponent.” The rest of the nation was in “even worse shape”: “We lack self-reliance in strategic industry, spare parts and reserves, and we lack resilience if things don’t immediately go our way.”

Such calls are a warning that the turn toward war will be accompanied by the suppression of dissent and demands that workers sacrifice their pay and conditions for the war effort.

As in every imperialist war, the war preparations are being conducted under the banner of bolstering the armed forces as a supposed means of averting war. But the very talk of “winning a war” heightens the danger of triggering one, whether over Taiwan, the South China Sea or another “flashpoint.”

This war drive is bipartisan. The Labor Party’s response, displayed at its national conference in March, has been to present itself as the party that forged the US alliance, and the party best able to extract from the working class the sacrifices necessary for war, working closely with the trade unions.

As shown in 2003, among the masses of working people throughout the world, there is an overwhelming desire to prevent war. But the anti-war movement was channelled behind the Democrats in the US and social democratic governments, which only continued the militarism. Obama, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, became the first American president to conduct war for his entire eight years in office.

Lessons must be drawn from this bitter experience. Whether in the US, China, Australia or any other country, workers have a common interest in preventing World War III. To succeed, however, the anti-war sentiment has to be translated into a conscious movement of the global working class against imperialism and all its political agencies.

To fight for that, in 2016, the International Committee of the Fourth International issued a decisive statement, *Socialism and the Fight Against War: Build an International Movement of the Working Class and Youth Against Imperialism!*

As that statement explained: “The new anti-war movement must be anti-capitalist and socialist, since there can be no serious struggle against war except in the fight to end the dictatorship of finance capital and the economic system that is the fundamental cause of militarism and war.”



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