

Australian defence minister reiterates commitment to join US war over Taiwan

Mike Head

24 November 2021

Australian Defence Minister Peter Dutton, who has close connections with Washington, this week repeated his declaration earlier this month that it would be “inconceivable” for Australia not to join a US war against China over Taiwan.

Staging a door-stop media conference outside Australia’s parliament on Tuesday, Dutton reaffirmed that “it would be inconceivable under the alliance that Australia wouldn’t go to be standing by the side of the United States” if it took military action against China after hostilities erupted with Taiwan.

Dutton said there was nothing “remarkable” in his comments. It was simply “a statement of reality.” More broadly, he ramped up his agitation against China, saying it had become “a very different country” under President Xi Jinping. “It’s really important that we understand what point in history we are,” he said, insinuating that China now posed a threat to the world.

In making these provocative comments, essentially committing Australia to a nuclear war that could kill billions and make the planet uninhabitable, Dutton is flying a flag for Washington. He is continuing efforts to poison public opinion against China and overcome deep popular concern and opposition over the prospect of such a catastrophic conflict.

That evening, Dutton made an appearance on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s flagship “7.30” current affairs TV program. Host Leigh Sales asked him: “But do you really think Australians would have the appetite to follow the US into another war after Iraq and Afghanistan?”

In response, Dutton doubled down. He not only accused China of planning to reunify with Taiwan by force. Beijing was also “ramping up” militarily across the Indo-Pacific, “bumping up against” neighbouring countries, and making demands that threatened

“freedom of speech,” “democratic rights” and “sovereignty” in Australia.

It is the US, not China, that has ramped up tensions throughout the Indo-Pacific over the past decade and is now deliberately undermining the One China policy that recognizes Taiwan as part of China and has underpinned diplomatic relations with Beijing for more than four decades.

The final barrage of accusations rests on a total distortion of formal complaints made by the Chinese embassy last year about Australian bans on Chinese investment and other punitive economic and political measures against China.

Dutton has become ever-more prominent since Prime Minister Scott Morrison elevated him to the defence portfolio in March. He is positioning himself to replace Morrison, whose Liberal-National Coalition government is increasingly faction-wracked, unpopular and reliant on an unstable majority in parliament.

Dutton’s comments closely mirror those of US President Joe Biden, who declared at a Town Hall meeting on October 21 that the US was committed to going to war against China in defence of Taiwan. “Yes, we have a commitment to do that,” Biden insisted when queried by the meeting’s moderator.

This was no throwaway line by Biden, who has been a central figure in the US military and foreign policy establishment for decades. In March, the outgoing head of the US Indo-Pacific Command, Admiral Phil Davidson, warned of the potential for war with China within six years.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley recently narrowed the time frame for a potential war over Taiwan to two years. Speaking at the Aspen Security Forum, Milley targeted China as the No 1. security threat to the United States. “We are witnessing

one of the largest shifts in global geostrategic power that the world has witnessed,” he said.

These remarks, like those of Biden and Dutton, clearly reflect the discussion taking place in the top military, intelligence and political echelons in Washington. Over the past decade, the Obama, Trump and Biden administrations have intensified an aggressive US military and economic confrontation with China, aimed at preventing it from threatening American global hegemony.

In his latest media foray, Dutton denounced the opposition Labor Party’s foreign affairs spokesperson, Senator Penny Wong. In a speech on Tuesday to the National Security College at the Australian National University, Wong accused Dutton of dangerously “amping up” the prospect of war to try to win the next federal election, due by May.

Wong absurdly claimed that Dutton was “wildly out of step” with US policy. She said Washington remained committed to maintaining the “One China” policy adopted in the 1970s and “strategic ambiguity” over whether it would defend Taiwan militarily.

In reality, following on from Trump, Biden has deliberately undermined this entire policy, including by letting it be known, via media leaks and the Taiwanese administration, that US Special Forces trainers have been on the island off China’s coast. The US is seeking to goad Beijing into taking action that the US and its allies could seize upon to justify military intervention.

Wong also cited Biden’s call at his recent virtual meeting with Xi for “common-sense guardrails” to prevent the US-China “competition” veering into “conflict, whether intended or unintended.” But Biden’s language, which rebuffed Xi’s proposal for “cooperation,” was effectively a threat, consistent with the underlying US course of confronting China.

While sowing illusions in Biden, Wong spoke as one dedicated to maintaining the US alliance. She stressed that, “as a US ally,” Australia should take a position consistent with that of Washington. Moreover, she stirred the anti-China pot herself, saying China had changed and was not acting as “responsible global power.” She backed the Morrison government’s accusations that China is committing “economic coercion” by adopting trade measures in response to Australia’s economic actions.

In later remarks to the media, Wong indignantly

rejected Dutton’s charge that Labor was “crabwalking” away from its bipartisan support for the recent AUKUS pact—a US–UK–Australian front against China that includes the supply of nuclear attack submarines to Australia. “Labor supports AUKUS, we support ANZUS,” she emphasised.

That is in line with Labor’s entire foreign policy, which ranks the US alliance as its first “principle,” and with its own record of supporting Australian participation in US wars since World War II, including in Afghanistan and Iraq.

At Labor’s national conference in March, the party presented itself as the author of 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.

Moreover, Dutton’s latest war drum-beating is not simply an election ploy. He has made a series of anti-China comments since becoming defence minister in March, starting by calling for a “frank” public discussion about the likelihood of war.

Dutton’s media offensives betray concerns in ruling circles about the widespread anti-war sentiment in Australia, which was intensified by the Iraq war. As tens of millions of people worldwide rallied and marched against that illegal invasion in 2003, Australia saw some of the world’s biggest protests, per capita.

Increasingly, the US accusations against China are taking on the frenzied character of the “big lie” of “weapons of mass destruction” that became the pretext for the 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.

There is only one force that can and must stop this lurch toward another world war—the international working class. Chinese, American and Australian workers have no interest in killing each other. Rather they have common interests, which can be defended only through a unified socialist strategy to put an end to capitalism, the source of imperialist war.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)