

Australia announces Ukraine military aid and condemns China

Mike Head
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Assured of bipartisan backing from the opposition Labor Party, the Liberal-National government is intervening in the Ukraine crisis by sending military equipment to the country via the NATO alliance, while also denouncing China for allegedly aiding the Russian invasion.

On both fronts, the Australian political establishment is doing everything it can to assist the Biden administration in exploiting Moscow's reactionary military operation to escalate the underlying US-led offensive against Russia and China.

On Friday, Prime Minister Scott Morrison promised "non-lethal military equipment," together with medical supplies, sharply elevating the government's alignment behind the build-up of NATO forces across Eastern Europe. "Non-lethal military equipment" is a contradiction in terms. In conditions of conflict, all military equipment supports the war effort.

In addition, the government is ramping up its existing cyber-warfare training for Ukrainian personnel, yet has ruled out sending troops, consistent with the denials issued by the US.

Morrison also declared support for a decision, being pushed by the White House, to cut Russia out of the SWIFT financial network, which would exclude it from the global banking system. This stance backs the US and UK governments, which are demanding the SWIFT ban, against European governments, particularly Germany, which have balked at the move because of their economic ties to Russia.

Morrison provocatively accused Beijing of undermining Western sanctions over Ukraine. He condemned a trade agreement struck earlier this month between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping. "You don't go and throw a lifeline to Russia in the middle of a period when they are invading another country," he said. "That is simply unacceptable."

Under the Russian-Chinese agreement, as part of a broader compact to strengthen relations, China agreed to lift restrictions on Russian wheat and barley. Accordingly, China's customs agency reportedly cleared the way for Russian wheat imports this week.

In a media conference, Morrison went further. First, he declared that the events in the Ukraine heralded a change in the world order, which now consisted of a global battle against "authoritarian and autocratic regimes."

In that context, Morrison proclaimed the historic significance of the Quad, a quasi-military anti-China alliance strengthened last year between the US, Japan, India and Australia, and the AUKUS pact signed by Australia with the US and UK in September, also directed against China. AUKUS featured the supply of nuclear-powered attack submarines to Australia.

Second, Morrison rejected this week's call by China's incoming ambassador to Australia for talks to meet "half way" on the disputes that Canberra has fomented against Beijing over the past five years. Belligerently, Morrison ruled out any negotiation on 14 complaints against Australia that the embassy issued in November 2020, which included a ban on the Chinese telco company Huawei supplying 5G technology, and far-reaching bans on Chinese investment in Australia.

Morrison repeated accusations that China's "14 points" amount to "coercion" of Australia and bragged of his record in helping the US and other imperialist powers to depict China in the same way. "I was the one who went to the G7 and threw the 14 points down on the table about how Australia was being coerced by China, by the Chinese government," he insisted.

In his own media remarks yesterday, Labor Party leader Anthony Albanese quickly backed Morrison in bracketing China with Russia, saying: "China is doing the opposite of what it should be doing." He told reporters that China's refusal to denounce Russia showed "it is also not

a democratic country... [and] doesn't respect international law."

The Labor leader effectively gave the Morrison government a blank cheque to ramp up its intervention into the Ukraine crisis. Asked if he expected Australia to send troops, Albanese made no objection and emphasized his close collaboration with the government.

Referring to briefings he had received from the government, the military and the intelligence agencies, Albanese declared: "Look, we'll continue to be briefed, as I was just a short time ago, a couple of days ago. We'll get ongoing briefings about this."

To underscore Labor's unconditional commitment to the US military alliance and the increasingly aggressive confrontation with Russia and China, Albanese gave an extended interview to Greg Sheridan, the foreign editor of the *Australian*, the Murdoch media's national flagship.

In the interview, Albanese boasted that the AUKUS pact could not have gone ahead without Labor's support. He backed Morrison's denunciation of China's "14 points." Albanese vowed that a Labor government would be "absolutely serious" about increasing military spending and bragged of Labor's record of leading the country during World War II and signing the 2011 pact to base US Marines in the strategic northern city of Darwin.

As he prepares for an election due by May, Albanese is seeking to burnish Labor's credentials as Australian imperialism's main party of war. It has either joined or given essential bipartisan backing to every barbaric US-led war of conquest since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union began, from the first Gulf War to the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and the military interventions in Libya and Syria.

Defence Minister Peter Dutton, who is positioning himself to replace Morrison as the government continues to be wracked by collapsing approval ratings and internal factional warfare, sought to outdo both the prime minister and the Labor leader.

Dutton described as "really deeply disturbing" China's failure to condemn Russia's Ukraine invasion. As he has done repeatedly, he again raised the spectre of a Chinese move to forcibly reunite Taiwan, which is still internationally recognised as part of China. Dutton said Beijing was "probably watching to see what the world reaction is so that they can make their own calculations down the track in relation to Taiwan."

That was in line with today's editorial in the *Australian*, which asserted: "There are clear parallels between Mr Putin's ambitions in Eastern Europe and Xi Jinping's

visions for China. Both want to end US hegemony and assert their claims to being great powers."

That assertion is part of the wall of anti-Russia and anti-China allegations being churned out by the corporate media in Australia, seeking to create public support for Australian participation in US-led wars against these two perceived obstacles to American global dominance.

Initial polls in Australia show no widespread support for war, and deep distrust in Morrison government and the political elite as a whole, intensified by the COVID-19 disaster. But this propaganda barrage is designed to create confusion and cover up the decades-long drive by the US and its allies to encircle and subjugate Russia and China.

As yesterday's statement by the International Committee of the Fourth International, "Oppose the Putin government's invasion of Ukraine and US-NATO warmongering! For the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers!" explained, the invasion of Ukraine, whatever the justifications offered by the Putin regime, will serve only to divide the Russian and Ukrainian working class and, moreover, serve the interests of US and European imperialism.

The statement warned: "The Biden administration, by refusing to discuss Russia's objections to Ukraine's integration into NATO, used Ukraine as bait. It incited the invasion, which will now be used as a pretext for escalating confrontation with Russia."

The Australian government and its Labor partners, supported by the media, are fuelling that confrontation.

To further clarify the critical historical issues at stake, the WSWs is this weekend hosting an international online webinar, "Fight COVID! Save Lives! Stop the drive to World War III!" Speakers will elaborate a political program to build a global working-class movement against war and the pandemic. We urge our readers to register and attend.



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