

Australia to send “lethal aid” to Ukrainian armed forces

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With full bipartisan support from the Labor Party opposition, Prime Minister Scott Morrison substantially escalated Australia’s involvement in the unfolding war crisis in Europe, announcing yesterday that his Liberal-National Coalition government will send “lethal aid” to Ukrainian military forces.

Australia was already one of the most vociferous backers of the US-NATO attempts to exploit Russia’s reactionary invasion to intensify a longstanding confrontation with Moscow, and also China. With Morrison’s announcement, the country is now directly involved in a conflict that threatens to spiral out of control and ignite a European-wide or even a world war.

The timing makes clear the extent to which the Australian political establishment is marching in lockstep with the US administration of President Joe Biden. Morrison confirmed the expanded Australian intervention after the US announced it would send an extra \$US350 million worth of US armaments to Ukrainian forces, while its NATO partner Germany pledged 1,000 anti-tank weapons and 500 Stinger surface-to-air missiles.

The flooding of the country with US-NATO arms is aimed at escalating the conflict. It is directed against any diplomatic resolution, ahead of talks between Russian and Ukrainian authorities in Belarus later today.

On Friday, Morrison had stated that Australia would send medical supplies to Ukraine, together with “non-lethal” military aid. This was combined with a series of expanding sanctions on the Russian state, leading politicians and business people. As the WSWs noted, in a shooting war, there is no such thing as “non-lethal” military supplies, given that whatever is sent will contribute to active hostilities. However, Morrison did rule out sending weaponry.

The turnaround, within the space of 72 hours, demonstrates the speed with which the US and its allies are intensifying their direct involvement in the conflict. It

shows that Morrison’s previous assertions that Australian troops would not be sent in the event of a NATO ground intervention could also be dispensed with overnight. As he stated, the military aid was a signal that “nothing is off the table” in terms of Australian involvement.

The government has not released any details. Morrison did say that the weaponry would be provided “through our NATO partners, particularly the US and the United Kingdom.” In practice, this will mean the government handing over money to the American and British governments and their associated arms dealers.

As is the case with all of the NATO “military aid,” at least some of the Australian war materiel will likely end up in the hands of Ukraine’s fascist militias. Since the US-instigated coup in 2014, directed against a Ukrainian government that leaned towards Russia, forces such as the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion have been directly integrated into the country’s armed forces and have been the beneficiaries of a flood of NATO weaponry.

Morrison combined the announcement of military aid with direct sanctions against Russian President Vladimir Putin. The government has also not ruled out expelling the Russian ambassador from the country, stating only that it will follow the lead of its allies, i.e., the US. Morrison also spoke with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy this morning.

The Labor Party is not only extending its full support to every new announcement made by the government in relation to the Ukraine. It is effectively campaigning for even greater Australian involvement.

Labor’s shadow treasurer Jim Chalmers this morning called for a “step up.” “Whether that is support with weapons, on the cybersecurity front, whether it is tightening the screws on the Russian economy, all of these things should be stepped up if they can,” he declared. Chalmers was one of a series of senior Labor MPs exposed in documents published by WikiLeaks to be

a “protected source” of the US embassy, i.e., an informant for the American government.

Notwithstanding its cynical references to the plight of Ukrainian civilians, Labor is exploiting the Ukraine crisis to burnish its “national security” and foreign policy credentials. It is seeking to turn the tide on a government campaign over the past month, alleging, without any basis, that Labor is “soft” on China and even an “appeaser” of its government.

On Saturday, Labor leader Anthony Albanese gave an extended interview to the *Australian's* Greg Sheridan, who has close ties to the Australian and US security establishments. Albanese stressed that there was not a skerrick of difference between Labor and the government on any foreign policy issue, including participation in the US-led campaigns against Russia and also China.

Albanese emphasised Labor’s central role in the establishment last September of AUKUS, a military alliance of the US, Britain and Australia, explicitly directed towards preparing war with China. He criticised the government only for its “bungles” in defence procurement and invoked Labor’s record in leading the country during the Second World War, the first Gulf War and in 2011, when Australia aligned with a vast US military build-up directed against Beijing.

Together with the government, Labor leaders are enthusiastically playing the role of a regional deputy sheriff for the US in the current crisis. They are exploiting it to ratchet up pressure on Beijing, denouncing the Chinese Communist Party government for its refusal to condemn the Russian invasion. Labor and Coalition MPs have explicitly linked the Ukraine crisis to the need for the “democratic” powers to combat both Russia and China, in line with the US strategy for maintaining American imperialist hegemony.

The line-up extends beyond the major parties to the entire political and media establishment. Not a single critical voice has been raised, warning against Australian involvement, much less pointing to the hypocrisy of the US and its allies, who have themselves been at war for the past 30 years.

The Greens, who postured as opponents of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, long ago dispensed with any pretense of opposition to imperialist war. They issued a statement on February 25, which said nothing about the US-NATO role in provoking the conflict, blaming it exclusively on Putin. “We call upon our foreign minister to use Australia’s Autonomous Sanctions framework to respond to Russia’s actions,” the Greens declared.

The media, including the state-funded Australian Broadcasting Corporation, is full of wall-to-wall denunciations of Putin as a “new Hitler,” a “psychopath” etc.

As is the case in the US and elsewhere, the whipping up of a wartime atmosphere serves a domestic political function. It is aimed at diverting attention from the ongoing COVID crisis, resulting from bipartisan “let it rip” policies which unleashed an Omicron surge in December, as well as widespread anger over stagnant or declining wages and worsening workplace conditions amid a rising cost of living.

The government and Labor are turning to militarism to try and offset a deep-going crisis of the parliamentary set-up in the lead up to a federal election in May. Morrison’s ability to survive till then has been called into question by the Coalition’s plummeting support, and public infighting within his Liberal Party. Labor goes into the election having lost any substantial base of support in the working class as a result of its decades-long enforcement of a corporate onslaught on working-class jobs and social conditions.

Workers and young people must reject the war hysteria. The fight for social rights and an end to the homicidal pandemic policies is inseparable from the struggle against imperialist war. The alternative to the official warmongering is a turn to a socialist and internationalist perspective, aimed at unifying workers in the US, Russia, Ukraine, China, Australia and everywhere else to prevent the threat of a world war through the overthrow of the bankrupt profit system.



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