

# Australian government sending second shipment of arms to Ukraine

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18 March 2022

The *Australian* newspaper revealed yesterday that the federal government, fully backed by the Labor Party opposition, is finalising a shipment of “lethal” aid to be sent to the right-wing, US-backed Ukrainian government, its military and associated fascist paramilitary forces.

The delivery is the second of its kind. The Australian government, supported by the entire political and media establishment, is thus contributing to the flood of weaponry into Ukraine. The clear purpose is to intensify the conflict, which already has the character of a proxy US-NATO war with Russia.

The *Australian* said the first shipment was flown by a Defence C-17 aircraft to Poland, before being transported into Ukraine. Morrison had initially indicated that the procurements would take the form of funds being sent to NATO. The second shipment, stocked from the Australian armoury, will also be flown to Eastern Europe.

Australia, together with Britain and other American allies, is helping to implement longstanding plans for conflict with Russia, aimed at asserting US hegemony over the geo-strategically critical Eurasian landmass. Australia is central to the other prong of this strategy—the confrontation with China—with Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Labor leader Anthony Albanese both using the Ukrainian crisis to place maximum pressure on Beijing.

The second shipment was reportedly the subject of discussions between Defence and Foreign Affairs representatives and Ukrainian embassy officials last week. The talks were held in secret, with no official summary of their content.

The extent of the aid is unknown, but the *Australian* said it would be larger than the first shipment of weaponry worth more than \$70 million.

*Australian* said the package, to be sent within a fortnight, “is likely to include rifles, ammunition, hand grenades and US-made Javelin anti-armour missiles.” Javelins are advanced missiles to be deployed against Russian tanks and other armoured vehicles. In the first fortnight of the conflict, the US and its allies dispatched 17,000 anti-tank missiles to Ukraine, with thousands more en route.

The speed with which the two packages have been put together points to the military build-up underway within Australia itself. In line with the country’s integration into Washington’s anti-China “pivot to Asia,” announced in 2011, successive Labor and Liberal-National Coalition governments have expanded military funding and acquisitions.

In 2020, the Coalition government, with Labor’s backing, announced a plan to boost military spending to \$578 billion over the course of this decade. That includes \$270 billion for military hardware, including US missiles such as the Javelins.

The shipment is slated to include “several thousand surplus Steyr rifles” from defence force stocks. Notably, the rifles are to be given to “civilian fighters and international recruits.”

As the WSWS has documented, Ukraine has become a mecca for right-wing extremists internationally. Thousands are travelling to the country to fight with neo-Nazi groups, such as the Azov Battalion, which is integrated into the Ukrainian military structure.

At the National Press Club on Wednesday, Dennis Richardson, a former secretary of the defence department and previous head of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), the domestic spy agency, was asked about the danger of the Australian arms ending up with right-wing extremists.

Richardson, who still plays a significant role in

defence and security circles, responded: “If there is a risk that down the track that arms might fall into the wrong hands, then so be it.”

The comment sums up the criminality of the gun-running operation. The government and Labor know they are sending millions of dollars in weapons that will aid fascist groups. These outfits openly model themselves on Ukraine’s World War II Nazi collaborators, who massacred hundreds of thousands of Jews, Poles and Russians.

The prominence of such groups underscores the fraudulent character of claims of a war for Ukrainian “democracy.” Rather, the fascist militias are to play a central role in longstanding US plans to provoke a Russian invasion of Ukraine, and bog down its military in a protracted war.

Ex-US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton this month favourably compared the operation to the CIA’s covert war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s. In that conflict, the US armed, funded and trained Islamists, including the predecessors of Al Qaeda. In Ukraine the US is using neo-Nazis as a proxy.

Richardson’s comment also has significant domestic implications. Since 2014, an unknown number of Australians have fought in the long-running Ukrainian civil war on the side of the Kiev government and against Russian-backed separatists in the country’s east.

At least one of them has been identified as a member of the Australian neo-Nazi National Socialist Network. In recent years, ASIO has belatedly acknowledged that a far-right milieu, fed by years of official anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim agitation, constitutes a significant terrorist threat.

Other remarks at the press club pointed to the Australian ruling elite exploiting the Ukrainian conflict to escalate the confrontation with China. Speaking alongside Richardson, Paul Dibb, a former assistant defence secretary, claimed that Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping have become the “closest friends” over recent years.

In reality, the Chinese regime has responded to the Ukraine crisis nervously. It fears being dragged into the war. While pointing to NATO’s central role in provoking the conflict, Xi’s government has not endorsed the Russian invasion.

Despite this, the Coalition and Labor are ramping up their rhetoric. In provocative comments, Morrison denounced Beijing’s “chilling silence” in failing to condemn the Russian invasion. He declared that Chinese military assistance to the Russian war effort, or assistance to evade the massive sanctions imposed by the Western powers would be “an abomination.” He warned that Australia would respond by expanding to China its sanctions targeting Russia, including businesspeople, political leaders and industries.

Labor’s shadow foreign affairs minister, Penny Wong, immediately endorsed the threat.

Significantly, the statements were made on Thursday, the day before a phone call between Xi and US President Joe Biden. According to the readout, in terms almost identical to those used by Morrison, Biden warned of the “consequences” of Chinese assistance for Russia. The timing of the twin messaging underscores the extent to which the Australia is functioning as a deputy sheriff for the US in the Indo-Pacific region.

While stoking up war, the Australian government and the political establishment are escalating a war against the social rights of the working class at home.

The dispatch of military hardware to Ukraine coincides with the flood crisis that has devastated areas of the Australian east coast over the past three weeks.

The official abandonment of ordinary people was summed up in the northern New South Wales city of Lismore, where flood victims were left to rescue one another without government assistance. Now, with thousands homeless, the state government is sending just 120 campervans to the flood-affected region for temporary accommodation.

In other words, the government is fully capable of a vast logistical undertaking in rapid time when it comes to weapons for a dirty, US-led war. But workers and young people, inundated by a flood and facing destitution, are on their own.



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