

Australia pushes for stepped-up NATO confrontation with China

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At a foreign ministers' meeting in Brussels last week, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) paired an escalation of the US-led confrontation against Russia with bellicose condemnations of China and pledges to expand NATO's presence in the Indo-Pacific region.

The focus of the summit was on Ukraine. The political exploitation of Russia's reactionary invasion, provoked by the US and NATO, to activate longstanding plans in Washington and Berlin for an aggressive war targeting Moscow was on full display. NATO and its member states pledged vast weapons shipments to the US-backed regime in Kiev, on top of the billions of dollars worth of armaments sent in recent weeks.

This was linked to the other front in American imperialism's drive to maintain global hegemony—its plans for conflict with China. That was signalled in the attendance at the meeting. US Indo-Pacific allies Japan and South Korea were invited to the foreign ministers' meeting for the first time. They were joined by Australia and New Zealand, both partners in the US-led Five Eyes network.

The Australian government, as it has during the past month, functioned as an aggressive attack dog of the Biden administration, seeking to use the Ukraine crisis to ramp up pressure on Beijing. According to Australian media reports, the country's foreign minister Marise Payne lobbied for NATO to commit to greater intervention in the Indo-Pacific, explicitly directed against the Chinese regime.

The Murdoch-owned *Australian* newspaper reported: "NATO has agreed to an Australian request to step up co-operation in the Asia-Pacific region, including in areas of maritime security, noting that China's unwillingness to condemn Russia's aggression in

Ukraine poses 'a serious challenge.'"

In addition to a meeting with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Payne held a closed-door discussion with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, even though Australia is not a NATO member.

In his closing public remarks, Stoltenberg declared that NATO had "agreed that we must support other regional partners under pressure, and we agreed to step up co-operation with our partners in the Asia-Pacific because the crisis has global ramifications.

"We have seen what is happening in Ukraine is being closely watched around the world. We have seen that China is unwilling to condemn Russia's aggression and Beijing has joined Moscow in questioning the right of nations to choose their own path."

In reality, the Chinese government has reacted nervously to the Ukraine crisis. It has pointed to the central role of the US in stoking the crisis, through the 30-year eastward expansion of NATO and the transformation of Ukraine into a US-armed garrison state on Russia's border. But it has not endorsed the Russian invasion, nor provided it with any assistance.

Despite this, US allies, led by Australia, have denounced China's refusal to condemn the Russian operation as "unconscionable." The Australian government, backed by the Labor Party opposition, has threatened to extend the sweeping sanctions imposed against Russia to China if it allegedly provides any aid to the Russian operation in Ukraine.

Australian government ministers have sought to draw a parallel between Russia's actions and supposed Chinese aggression against Taiwan.

In fact the US has deliberately transformed Taiwan into a key flashpoint in its aggressive confrontation with Beijing. Biden's administration, following on from Trump's, has undermined the One China policy,

under which Beijing is recognised as the government of all of China, including Taiwan. Biden has sent senior officials to Taipei, along with military advisors, and threatened war if Beijing seeks to establish control over the island.

The plans for an expanded NATO presence in the Indo-Pacific coincide with the push by several European powers, including France and the UK, to extend their military influence in the region. But above all, the focus on China at the summit was driven by the US.

The *Australian* reported that Payne and Blinken expressed “shared concerns” over the revelation last month that there was a supposed draft military agreement between China and the tiny Pacific nation of Solomon Islands.

The US and Australia have both warned publicly against the deal, and are doing everything they can to prevent it from being signed. This underscores the fraudulent character of claims that the US-led build up in the Indo-Pacific is directed at ensuring the rights of countries throughout the region. Instead, Washington and its partners, like Australia, are seeking to shore up their hegemony over the Indo-Pacific and block growing Chinese influence.

The aggressive character of this campaign was underscored by a joint announcement by Biden, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and British PM Boris Johnson, timed to coincide with the NATO meeting. Expanding AUKUS, an Indo-Pacific military alliance of the three countries established last September, they unveiled a program to build hypersonic missiles, some of which would be stationed in Australia.

The development of these advanced long-range weapons systems, which could carry nuclear payloads, is part of an escalating military buildup by the three countries. Australia is planning to acquire nuclear-powered submarines, hasten its construction of missiles, build new naval bases and expand its military.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian condemned the hypersonic missiles announcement as a move that would “undermine peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.” He warned that the “ultimate goal” of AUKUS was to “create the Asia-Pacific version of NATO and serve US hegemony outright. Asia-Pacific countries are of course firmly opposed to

this.”

The state-owned *Global Times* cited the comments of Yang Xiyu, a senior research fellow at the China Institute of International Studies, who said the Brussels meeting was a further step in NATO’s eastward expansion.

“The US has used NATO to shift its global strategic focus and alliance system to the east. From the Iraq war to the Afghan and Syria wars, we have witnessed NATO’s more frequent military operations outside NATO and more NATO members’ presence in the South and East China Sea and the Asia-Pacific region.”

Australia’s prominence at the NATO summit and in the hypersonic missile announcement demonstrates its central role in the US plans for war against China.

This has a domestic political component. With a federal election due to be called, the Liberal-National Coalition government and the Labor opposition are competing with one another in their hawkishness and military aggression. Virtually every day brings a new government announcement of expanded defence spending.

For his part, Labor leader Anthony Albanese is pitching his party to the military-security apparatus as a more reliable partner for the Biden administration.

Labor has sought to outdo the Coalition, demanding over recent days that the government expel Russian diplomats from the country, in line with the actions of the US and several European powers. Albanese has denounced Putin as a “war criminal,” without any substantiation, echoing earlier comments by Biden that seek to block any diplomatic resolution to the Ukrainian crisis.

The turn to a “khaki election” is also aimed at diverting widespread anger over the disastrous official “live with the virus” COVID policies, soaring inflation and accelerating social inequality.



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