

Militarist frenzy erupts in Australia over security pact between China and the Solomon Islands

Oscar Grenfell, SEP Senate candidate for NSW
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The issues of militarism and war have erupted to centre stage in the Australian federal election campaign. The Liberal-National Coalition government, Labor and the entire official media have responded to the announcement last week of a security pact between China and the Solomon Islands with frothing denunciations of Beijing, openly raising the prospect of military conflict in the Pacific.

This morning, Defence Minister Peter Dutton stated that it was necessary to “prepare for war.” The opposition Labor Party has been seeking to outflank the government from the right, declaring that it would prevent the Solomon agreement from coming to fruition by any means necessary.

The claims that the agreement represents an imminent threat to the security of the US and Australia are absurd lies. The Solomons are almost 10,000 kilometres from Los Angeles and over 1,600 kilometres from northern Australia. Like the other Pacific Island nations, the Solomons, with a population of fewer than 700,000 people, is beset by poverty and a lack of rudimentary infrastructure, the legacy of decades of imperialist oppression.

The real reason for the immense consternation in Washington and Canberra was blurted out by an editorial in the Murdoch-owned *Australian* newspaper on Thursday. “Beijing’s pact with Honiara could hardly be more geopolitically significant for the challenge it presents to longstanding US hegemony in the region,” it declared.

The hysterical reaction to the agreement reveals two key elements of the world political situation that have been concealed from working people by the political and media establishment.

Firstly, the US is engaged in advanced preparations for an aggressive war with China, which it views as the chief threat to its dominance in the Indo-Pacific and internationally. As President Joe Biden has ratcheted up decade-long threats and provocations against Beijing, American military generals have declared that such a war would be fought in the coming years, not decades.

Secondly, Australia is on the frontlines of these war plans. As leading think-tanks have outlined, it is to play a decisive role in a US-led conflict with China as a “southern anchor” for American and allied military forces, and the enforcer of a naval blockade of key Pacific shipping lanes upon which Beijing relies for raw materials and basic goods. That is why successive Australian governments, Labor and Coalition, have engaged in a vast military build-up in league with the US.

Australia is already carrying out a central role in the political campaign that goes hand in hand with the war drive. In particular, Australia serves as a US deputy sheriff in the Pacific, which has historically been dominated by Australian and New Zealand imperialism, under the umbrella of the dominant power of the day, first Britain and then, from World War II on, the US.

Significantly, it is the Labor Party that has most directly invoked this imperialist legacy in its condemnations of the agreement and of the Coalition government for supposedly allowing it to be signed.

Speaking last week, Labor’s shadow foreign affairs minister, Penny Wong, decried the signing of the pact as “the worst foreign policy blunder in the Pacific since the end of World War II.” The government had not responded “in the most energetic, effective, and agile way.” Wong declared that a Labor administration would never “take a backwards step” in confronting China.

In a debate with Prime Minister Scott Morrison last Wednesday, Labor leader Anthony Albanese said the Coalition had left “our backyard” unsecured, allowing China to establish a foothold less than 2,000 kilometres from northern Australia.

Albanese and other Labor leaders are harking back to the “yellow peril” racism upon which their party was founded, involving lurid warnings of a potential Asian invasion of the country’s northern approaches. They have also invoked Labor’s role as the preeminent party of war, including its

record in the Pacific theatre of World War II.

Above all, Labor has sought to present itself as a more reliable partner of the Biden administration in its provocations, military preparations and attacks on China.

In their condemnations of the government, the Labor leaders have been vague on the methods that should have been deployed to scuttle the agreement. Albanese, however, hailed the decision of the Biden administration to dispatch Kurt Campbell, the White House Indo-Pacific coordinator, for a closed-door discussion with Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare on Friday.

Media reports make clear that Campbell conducted himself in the manner of a mafia don, issuing thinly-veiled threats against Sogavare if the agreement proceeded.

These were even contained in a White House statement, which declared: “If steps are taken to establish a de facto permanent [Chinese] military presence, power-projection capabilities, or a military installation, the delegation noted that the United States would then have significant concerns and respond accordingly.”

The US threat to “respond accordingly” and Labor’s calls for the most “energetic...and agile response” hint at a military intervention if the deal proceeds and a regime-change operation against Sogavare. His government has already been destabilised by a right-wing separatist movement in Malaita province, encouraged by Washington.

Sogavare’s previous administration was ousted in 2006-07 as a result of Canberra’s intrigues, which were followed by Australia’s protracted military occupation of the Solomons in a bogus “peace keeping” mission.

The Coalition has used events marking today’s militarist Anzac Day holiday to burnish its credentials with even more explicit threats. Morrison declared this morning that the establishment of a Chinese military presence in the Solomon’s would be his government’s “red line”—a phrase that has repeatedly been used over recent years to describe an action that would trigger war.

Defence minister Peter Dutton declared “We’re in a period very similar to the 1930s now.” It was necessary to confront the “arc of autocracy,” a bellicose term the Australian government now uses to describe China and Russia. “The only way you can preserve peace is to prepare for war, and be strong as a country. Not to cower, not to be on bended knee and be weak. That’s the reality,” Dutton stated.

The remarks were visibly shocking even to Dutton’s right-wing breakfast television interviewer Karl Stefanovic. They only make explicit, however, what has been the policy of every Australian government since 2010, beginning with the Gillard Labor administration’s embrace of the US “pivot to Asia,”—the turn to a diplomatic, economic and military

confrontation with China throughout the Indo-Pacific. That policy is to fully integrate Australia into the US-led preparations for war against China which threatens nothing less than nuclear catastrophe.

The bullying and aggressive attitude of the US and Australia to the impoverished Solomons exposes the fraud that these war plans have anything to do with defending “democracy” or “national sovereignty.”

In provoking a proxy war with Russia, Washington and Canberra have presented Ukraine’s ability to join the US-dominated and militarist NATO alliance as a holy right that must be protected at all costs, even if it leads to World War III. However, when it comes to an agreement between the Solomons and China, “national sovereignty” is thrown out the window in favour of open imperialist meddling and threats.

The real driving forces of the war danger are the attempts of US imperialism to offset its economic decline through its overwhelming military might, and the global crisis of the capitalist system, accelerated by the coronavirus pandemic. The eruption of frenzied militarism is a warning to the working class of how close the world is to a war that would threaten the very existence of humanity.

The Socialist Equality Party is the only party in the Australian elections opposing the war drive and seeking to mobilise the working class against it. We appeal to workers and young people to join the fight by our world party, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), to build a global anti-war movement uniting the international working class.

The anti-war movement must be international; based on the immense social power of the working class; independent of the pro-war political establishment, and directed against the source of conflict, the capitalist system. Register for the ICFI’s international online May Day rally next weekend to join this crucial struggle!

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