

Australian government, Labor use Anzac Day to declare plans for war against China

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Anzac Day, marking the disastrous landing of Australian and New Zealand troops in Turkey one hundred years ago, has always been used to promote militarism and war. But not since World War II has the public holiday been so openly linked to preparations for a major new war whose horrors would dwarf those of the 20th century conflagrations.

The Liberal-National Coalition government and the Labor Party opposition spent yesterday competing with one another over who would be best placed to join the US in an aggressive war against China. Amid what has been dubbed a “khaki election,” both made more public and explicit than ever before decade-long preparations for Australia to play a front-line role in Washington’s war drive against Beijing.

The day began with defence minister Peter Dutton declaring, on breakfast television, that “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.”

The government has dispensed with even a pretence of diplomacy. In earlier years, it would refer to “rising tensions” in the Indo-Pacific region and insinuate that they were the product of supposed Chinese aggression, without naming that country. Now, there are no such qualms.

Dutton stated: “The Chinese, through their actions, through their words, are on a very deliberate course at the moment, and we have to stand up with countries to stare down any act of aggression.”

The Coalition, together with Labor, has fully supported the US-NATO proxy war against Russia, including through the provision of more than \$150 million in weaponry to Ukraine’s far-right government. Australia’s particular contribution to the US campaign has been to link the issues of Russia and China, which the government has begun describing as an “arc of autocracy.”

Dutton said that the period today was “very similar to the 1930s...We have to be realistic that people like Hitler and others aren’t just a figment of our imagination or that they’re consigned to history. We have in President Putin, at the moment, somebody who is willing to kill women and

children. That’s happening in the year 2022.” China, he suggested, was little different.

The gratuitous description of Putin relativises the Holocaust and turns reality on its head. Putin’s reactionary invasion is a desperate response to the encirclement of Russia by the US and NATO, which, over the past 30 years have carried out illegal wars, the criminality of which are unprecedented since the Third Reich.

But more significant than the falsifications contained in Dutton’s statements were their implications. If the Australian government, together with the US, declares that Putin and Chinese President Xi are akin to the Nazis, the logical conclusion is that war is inevitable.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison made clear that such a conflict is not in the distant future but something that the government is actively stoking in the present.

Amid a hysterical furore over the signing of a security pact between China and the Solomon Islands last week, Morrison has repeatedly declared that the establishment of any Chinese military presence in the tiny Pacific Island nation would be his government’s “red line.” The term is unambiguous. If a “red line” is crossed, war is launched.

A journalist noted this and asked Morrison how his government would enforce such a “red line.” Morrison responded by pointing to the AUKUS agreement, an aggressive military pact between the US, the UK and Australia, unveiled last September. Its purpose was not just to facilitate Australia’s acquisition of a new fleet of nuclear armed submarines. Instead it extended to every area of military preparation.

The government is collaborating closely with Washington and London on a vast expansion of cyber-warfare capabilities. At the same time, it has initiated a program to acquire a range of conventional missiles, and is planning on the establishment of a new naval military base on the country’s east coast. AUKUS announced last month that it was turning to the development of new generation hypersonic missiles, which could potentially be armed with nuclear weapons.

Australia's military spending sits at over \$600 billion this decade, and more than two percent of annual gross domestic product, as the country is placed on a war footing.

The aggressive statements on Anzac Day were immediately condemned by Chinese officials, who said claims that Beijing was preparing to establish a military base on the Solomons were "fake news." Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare, who has been hectored and threatened by the US and Australia, similarly declared his government would not permit any base.

The real driving force of the US-led confrontation was hinted at by Morrison. He said that the "arc of autocracy" was "challenging the rules-based order our grandparents secured," i.e., in WWII. Put into plain English, the threats against China are aimed at ensuring the US imperialist hegemony secured through war 80 years ago, including the transformation of the Pacific Ocean into what leading military generals described as an "American lake."

The most striking aspect of the government's open preparations for war, is that they are not opposed in the slightest by any section of the political and media establishment. The Labor Party, in particular, is not condemning the Coalition from the standpoint that its threats risk a catastrophe. Instead, it is pitching itself as a more reliable vehicle for implementing the demands of the US and Australian military-security establishments.

Labor's foreign affairs shadow minister Penny Wong has accused the government of the "greatest foreign policy failure" since WWII, because it failed to scuttle the China-Solomon agreement. Today, she is touring the increasingly militarised north of Australia, which would play a key role in any conflict with China, to advance Labor's alternative policy in the Pacific. It entails a campaign to link the militaries of the various Pacific Island nations to Canberra and a major "soft power" campaign that will amount to sweeping interference in their internal affairs.

Labor's deputy leader, who is also in Darwin, where the previous Labor government established a US marine base in 2010, accepted entirely the premise that it was necessary to plan for war. "[C]ertainly, we need to prepare, but we have not seen the preparation under this government," he stated.

In other words, Labor is effectively criticising the government from the right, condemning it for not pursuing the military build-up with sufficient speed. Albanese has bemoaned the fact that there is not yet a near-term timetable for the acquisition of a fleet of nuclear-armed submarines. He has suggested fitting the existing diesel-powered vessels with Tomahawk missiles in the interim.

Last week, Labor's shadow defence minister Brendan O'Connor denounced the government for abandoning a \$1.3 billion program to purchase unarmed drones. This decision

was "bewildering," he said, and would be reviewed by a Labor government "as a matter of urgency."

O'Connor stated: "It is incumbent upon any government to assess our capability gaps now, not just in the medium to long term. We'd be looking at increasing firepower and certain defence assets where we are deficient, and I would suggest one of the areas that's deficient includes uncrewed, armed drones." That is, Labor would prepare for imminent war.

The open discussion of the war preparations express how advanced they are. It is also an attempt to condition public opinion under conditions of widespread hostility to militarism. The government and Labor are in their deepest crisis in decades. Both are widely despised for their massive handouts to big business, cuts to health and education, and refusal to address a cost of living and low wages crisis.

But the danger is that absent a political movement of the working class, the war preparations are able to proceed, even as they are overseen by unpopular parties with no mandate for their criminally reckless policies. The Greens, the various independents, right-wing populists, the media and the trade unions have no opposition to war, and, in one form or other, line up with the preparations for conflict.

The Socialist Equality Party is the only party in the election fighting to transform the widespread anti-war sentiment into a political mobilisation of the working class, directed against all of the pro-war parties and the source of conflict, the capitalist system they defend. Sign up to our campaign today!

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