

Oppose US and Australian threats to Solomon Islands!

Socialist Equality Party (Australia)
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The Socialist Equality Party denounces the threats of military intervention being made by the US and Australia against the small Pacific islands country of Solomon Islands after its government signed a security agreement with China.

The SEP calls on workers in Australia and the US, as well as across the Pacific and internationally, to oppose the preparations being made to oust the country's democratically-elected government.

Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare last week told the country's parliament that the impoverished former British colony was in danger of invasion by the two allied powers.

Far from his statement being absurd or deranged, as contemptuously asserted throughout the political and corporate establishment, he was clearly acting in response to warnings issued against his government behind closed doors, as well as public ultimatums.

A series of open threats by Washington and Canberra have been reinforced by what a senior US official described as a "candid conversation" with Sogavare about the "potential regional security implications of the agreement not just for ourselves, but for allies and partners across the region."

This statement by Daniel Kritenbrink, who was part of a top-level US delegation to the Solomons last month, exposes the source of the US-Australian intervention plans: The escalating US-led war drive against China throughout the Indo-Pacific region, with Australia as one of its key bases, even as Washington intensifies its proxy war against Russia in Ukraine.

Both Russia and China are regarded as obstacles to US global hegemony that must be crushed at all costs, even at the risk of another world war, this time fought with nuclear weapons.

That is why the Solomon Islands-China deal has been thrust to centre stage in Australia's May 21 federal election. Both the Liberal-National Coalition government and the Labor Party opposition have demonised the agreement. They are vying to prove themselves to be the most reliable and ruthless advocate of Australian and US imperialist interests.

With the assistance of its Australian partners, the US ruling class is intent on retaining the domination over the Pacific that it established after defeating Japan in World War II. No Chinese foothold, no matter how limited, can be tolerated that would in any way challenge Washington's grip over the vast ocean.

The Biden administration has rapidly intensified the confrontation with Beijing that was launched by the Obama administration's military and strategic "pivot to Asia," which was formally announced in the Australian parliament in 2011.

The then Gillard Labor government enthusiastically backed the US military buildup across the Indo-Pacific region, including by stationing US marines in Darwin and more closely integrating Australia's military forces and bases into those of the US, providing a platform for war against China.

Over the past decade, the integration of the Australian military into US war plans against China has proceeded apace and military spending has been vastly expanded. The signing of the AUKUS agreement with the US and Britain took the preparations for war to an entirely new level, including Australia's acquisition of nuclear-powered attack submarines.

Under Biden, US military spending has increased to record levels and provocative high-level US delegations have visited Taiwan—defying the 50-year-old "One China" policy. US warships have sailed through the Taiwan Straits and into territorial waters around Chinese-occupied islets in the South China Sea, and Beijing has been accused of a litany of human rights abuses.

The threats to Solomon Islands can be understood only in that context. It is a poverty-stricken country of some 700,000 people and about 1,000 islands, located roughly 2,000 kilometres away from northern Australia and 12,000 kilometres from the US west coast.

With other Pacific island states, however, it became a key battleground in World War II, including the six-month 1942–43 Battle of Guadalcanal on the island that hosts the

country's capital, Honiara. All the Pacific islands are once again key strategic locations in US-led plans for a potentially catastrophic war against China.

Briefing journalists last month, Kritenbrink refused to deny plans for military intervention in Solomon Islands. He had accompanied the US Indo-Pacific coordinator Kurt Campbell to Honiara, where Campbell publicly declared on April 22 that Washington would have "significant concerns" and "respond accordingly," if China were permitted to have any military presence in the country.

There is no mention of a Chinese base in the draft security agreement that was leaked to the media. Instead, it speaks of the Solomons government permitting China to "make ship visits" and "carry out logistical replenishment."

Nevertheless, the Campbell-Kritenbrink delegation also visited Fiji and Papua New Guinea, to warn those governments against any similar treaties with China. That underscores Washington's wider intent to block any Chinese presence in the Pacific.

Campbell's April 22 threat was swiftly echoed by Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who said a Chinese base in Solomon Islands would be a "red line"—that is, a trigger for military intervention. Defence Minister Peter Dutton broadened the attack. He accused China of "aggression" and said Australia needed to "prepare for war."

Australia's Labor Party sought to outbid the government in lining up behind Washington. In an unmistakable reference to the Pacific war against Japan, Labor's shadow foreign affair minister Penny Wong described the Solomons agreement with China as the "worst Australian foreign policy blunder in the Pacific since the end of World War Two."

Throughout the election campaign, Labor has pitched itself to the corporate elite and Washington as the party most committed to the US military alliance, and best able to lead the country in war and police the necessary sacrifices by the working class, as it did in the first two world wars.

Australian imperialism, which has lucrative mining, resources, banking and other interests in the Solomons and throughout the southwest Pacific, acts as a "deputy sheriff" for US imperialism in the region, as former Prime Minister John Howard once boasted.

One of Sogavare's previous administrations was ousted in 2006–07 as a result of Canberra's machinations, which were part of a protracted Australian-led military occupation of the Solomons, the 2003 to 2017 Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI).

Since shifting diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China in 2019, Sogavare's current government has been destabilised already by a right-wing separatist movement in

Malaita province, encouraged by Washington. The Malaitan forces led a failed coup attempt last November that involved three days of anti-Chinese looting and arson in Honiara.

While in Honiara, Campbell's delegation held talks with opposition leaders, who have also, like the Malaitan provincial premier, vowed to not only repudiate the China agreement, but reverse the recognition of China and restore diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

According to the *Australian* on May 6, citing "senior government sources" a discussion has been held "at the highest levels" about cutting off Solomon Islands' access to an Australian Pacific labour scheme. Such a step would be a major economic blow. Currently, about 3,000 Solomons workers are employed under that cheap labour scheme, sending remittances to their families.

The intimidating attitude of the US and Australia to the Solomons, Fiji and Papua New Guinea exposes the lie that the US war plans against China and Russia are about defending "democracy" or "national sovereignty."

In goading Russia into war, Washington and Canberra have said Ukraine's "sovereign right" to join the NATO military alliance must be upheld, even if it leads to a nuclear World War III. However, when it comes to Pacific island states, "national sovereignty" is treated with contempt.

The Socialist Equality Party is the sole party in the Australian elections opposing the US-led war drive against Russia and China and seeking to mobilise the working class, in Australia and internationally, against it. As we say in our election statement: "Only a unified anti-war movement of the international working class can halt this reckless plunge towards a nuclear catastrophe."

* Hands off the Solomon Islands!

* Oppose the US-led war drive against China!

* For a global anti-war movement of the working class!

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