Australia backs US provocations against China over Taiwan

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The Australian Labor government has, over the past week, deepened its role as the preeminent attack dog of American imperialism in the Asia-Pacific region. It has joined with the Biden administration in ratcheting up the confrontation with China, which was dramatically escalated last week by the highly-provocative visit of US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan.

Pelosi's visit had the character of a military operation threatening a direct clash with China. Her trip was flanked by a US aircraft carrier, a destroyer, a cruiser and dozens of F-35 aircraft. Above all, it was a direct blow to the "One China" policy, under which the international community has defacto recognised Beijing as the sole legitimate government of all China, including Taiwan.

Pelosi's trip was met with the largest live fire military drills in the Taiwan Strait that China has ever conducted. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) government has also cut a number of diplomatic and military channels with the US in retaliation.

Australia, together with the US and other allies, has presented China as the threat, covering up the aggressive character of Pelosi's visit, which was clearly aimed at provoking a response from Beijing.

At a foreign ministers' meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations that concluded in Phnom Penh Cambodia over the weekend, Australia joined with the US and Japan to issue a bellicose statement condemning China's military exercises in Taiwan.

The document expressed "concern about the People's Republic of China's (PRC) recent actions that gravely affect international peace and stability, including the use of large-scale military exercises." The US, Japanese and Australian representatives "condemned the PRC's launch of ballistic missiles, five of which the Japanese government reported landed in its exclusive economic zones, raising tension and destabilizing the region."

Of course, the joint statement said nothing about US actions, including the protracted undermining of the "One China" policy now spanning several US administrations, Washington's provision of arms and special forces military trainers to Taiwan or Pelosi's visit and the US military mobilization surrounding it.

The US, Japan and Australia are members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), an alliance of the four largest militaries in the region, including India, directed against China. The Quad, minus India, came together at the summit to issue the hardline denunciation of Beijing, under conditions where they had been unable to secure such a statement from the ASEAN representatives as a whole.

An ASEAN foreign ministers' statement on "the Cross Strait Development" had warned against the destabilisation of the area, which "eventually could lead to miscalculation, serious confrontation, open conflicts and unpredictable consequences among major powers." It called for "maximum restraint" from "all leaders," unequivocally endorsed the "One China" policy, and did not explicitly mention the CCP government.

The statement clearly expressed fears among a number of Asian states that the US provocations over Taiwan are risking a catastrophe.

Throughout the summit, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong played a particularly provocative role. She demonstratively walked out of an address by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, accusing him of trying to justify the killing of innocent Ukrainian citizens.

The Labor government has fully supported the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, with its Prime Minister Anthony Albanese visiting Kiev in June and pledging $100 million to military operations directed against Moscow.

As with the statement issued with Japan and the US, Wong's response to Lavrov was aimed at sending a signal to ASEAN states that are wavering on the US confrontations with Russia and China. Indonesia and several other states have maintained trade relations with Russia, which they are heavily dependent upon. At the end of June, Indonesian President Joko Widodo travelled to Ukraine and Russia, where he held a joint press conference with President Vladimir Putin.

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In remarks to the media, while the summit was still underway on Friday, Wong had branded the Chinese military exercises in the Taiwan Strait as "deeply concerning" and "disproportionate and destabilising." Wong said she had made these characterisations directly to Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who was also at the summit.

Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles went further, accusing China of having breached the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), with its live-fire drills.

The allegation of a breach of international law is deliberately incendiary. Its clear aim is to justify, in advance, further US-led provocations, including military actions, on the grounds that they are a defence of the "international rules-based order."

The Labor government's line has received unanimous support throughout the political and media establishment. Every day, the major news outlets, including the publicly-funded Australian Broadcasting Corporation, speak gravely of China's actions in relation to Taiwan, echoing all of the talking points of the Biden administration.

There has not been a single voice in the Australian parliament, warning against the country's frontline role in aggression against China, which threatens a catastrophic war.

The obvious points have been completely buried. The US militarisation of Taiwan, and its undermining of the "One China" policy, is not of a defensive character in the slightest. It would be as if China and Russia were threatening not to recognise US control over its unincorporated territory of Puerto Rico and seeking to transform it into a military base and centre of political intrigue against Washington.

Marles' references to UNCLOS, which have passed without contradiction in the political and media establishment, are also a sham. The US routinely claims to be acting on the basis of international law but has refused to ratify the convention and arrogates to itself the right to conduct naval operations in any part of the world.

Over recent months, information has repeatedly emerged, showing that the US, together with allies such as Australia and Canada, are continuously conducting naval and military operations throughout the South China and East China Seas. These have resulted in purported "near misses," between Chinese and US-allied military forces and included at least one American incursion into Chinese claimed waters in the South China Sea last month.

Together with its participation in these military activities, the Labor government is moving to rapidly expand the Australian armed forces. Along with the former Liberal-National Coalition government, Labor is committed to unprecedented military spending of $600 billion over this decade, but has signalled that more will be required.

Labor last week announced an "urgent review" into military capabilities, which will focus on the country's readiness for "state-on-state conflict."

The review will be undertaken by Stephen Smith and Sir Angus Houston. Smith was Labor Defence Minister in 2011 when Australia signed on to the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia," a vast military build-up throughout the Asia-Pacific, directed against China. Houston was Chief of the Defence Force at the same time. Both are thus heavily plugged into the US and Australian military-intelligence networks, especially those focused on confrontation with Beijing.

With regards to the "human rights" and "democracy" rhetoric that has accompanied the ratcheting-up of tensions against China, it is worth noting that Smith and Houston were respectively the top political and military leaders when Australian special forces conducted summary executions and other war crimes in Afghanistan.

The review is focusing on "capability gaps," under conditions of an ongoing discussion within strategic circles over the need for a vast expansion of Australia's offensive weaponry. Under the AUKUS pact with Britain and the US, unveiled last September, hypersonic missiles are to be stationed in Australia in the coming period, and it is to acquire a fleet of nuclear-powered attack submarines.

In comments reported in the press today, Marles signalled that his government was considering purchasing such submarines, which are more suited to long-range operations and great power conflict, off the shelf from the United States. A domestically produced fleet, which would not be operational until 2040, he indicated, would leave a major "capability gap."

In other words, the Labor government, together with the entire political establishment, is preparing to participate in an aggressive war against China, not in the coming decades, but in the coming years or sooner. This underscores the urgency of the fight to build an international anti-war movement of the working class, directed against the source of conflict, the capitalist system itself.

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