

Ex-Australian prime minister Rudd appointed ambassador to US

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26 December 2022

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese last week announced that his immediate predecessor as a Labor Party prime minister, Kevin Rudd, would take up Australia's most sensitive diplomatic posting, that of ambassador to the United States, the military ally on which the country's ruling class has depended since World War II.

Corporate media, political and strategic think tank commentators welcomed the appointment, noting that the first-ever selection of an ex-prime minister to occupy the post took the US-Australia relationship to a new level.

In some respects, the appointment appears contradictory. Rudd has a history of cautioning against a war with China, which the Biden administration has identified as *the* existential threat to US hegemony.

There is no doubt, however, that Rudd is a loyal defender of the US alliance, as the Labor Party has been since the last world war. He is committed to helping to try to maintain the supremacy of US imperialism in the Asia-Pacific and globally that it acquired as a result of that conflagration.

In fact, his nomination is another signal by the Albanese government of its readiness to align Australia more closely than ever behind US imperialism and its aggressive confrontation with China. Since taking office in May, the Labor government has gone to great lengths to act as the spearhead of US interests across the Indo-Pacific, from establishing closer military ties to Japan to bullying small Pacific Island states into "security" treaties, and further opening up northern Australia to the stationing of US forces, including nuclear-capable B-52 bombers.

Moreover, Rudd's appointment was vetted and accepted by the Biden administration. The *Australian*, which editorialised in favour of the decision, reported: "The *Australian* understands Dr Rudd's appointment was privately raised with US officials, who had wanted a 'status appointment' matching its decision to send Caroline Kennedy to Canberra. While some US officials are expected to be wary of Dr Rudd, they have endorsed his appointment to ensure a 'direct line' to Mr Albanese."

That calculation underscores how important the Biden

administration regards being able to swiftly and firmly communicate its wishes to the Labor government as it escalates the US economic and military conflict with China. Regardless of the tactical twists and turns involved in the US confrontation, such as Biden's recent meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, the US has continued to intensify its economic measures against China and its military moves and alliances to encircle the country.

Rudd's selection may seem anomalous because last year he criticised the previous Morrison Liberal-National Coalition government for entering into the AUKUS military pact with the US and UK, clearly targeting China, which includes supplying long-range nuclear-powered attack submarines and hypersonic missiles to Australia. Rudd said AUKUS was a "slippery slope to pre-commitment to becoming an active belligerent" in a war against China that would rival the "destructive scale" of the Pacific War of 1942-1945.

Significantly, Rudd was ousted as prime minister in 2010 via a backroom inner-party coup by a cabal of Labor and trade union powerbrokers who were secret "protected sources" of the US embassy. That was because Rudd had suggested that Washington should accommodate itself, to some degree at least, to the rise of China as an economic power.

Secret US diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks in December 2010 revealed that the Obama administration had become increasingly hostile to Rudd's unwanted diplomatic initiatives, launched without consultation with Washington, to seek to ease rising tensions between the US and China. Rudd also had scuttled the formation of a Quadrilateral security grouping between the US, India, Japan and Australia, aimed against China.

Following Rudd's ouster, Obama went to Australia in November 2011 to announce his administration's military and strategic "pivot to Asia" in the Australian parliament. He and Rudd's replacement, Julia Gillard, signed an agreement to station American Marines in Darwin and allow greater US access to other military bases, placing the

Australian population on the front line of any conflict with China.

Rudd's removal sent a warning. For US imperialism, there was no room for hedging by the Australian ruling elite. Regardless of which party was in office, it had to line up unconditionally behind the US conflict with China, no matter what the consequences for the loss of its export markets in China, Australia's largest trading partner.

Rudd himself heeded that warning. When he was briefly reinstated as prime minister for 11 weeks in 2013, he adhered to the unequivocal alignment. Since then he has occupied lucrative posts in US-backed think tanks, most recently as president of the Rockefeller Foundation's Asia Society.

Among those welcoming Rudd's appointment are anti-China war hawks on both sides of the Pacific. In the US, Center for a New American Security chief executive Richard Fontaine, a former adviser to US Senator John McCain, said Rudd's Washington contacts would stand him in good stead when he took up the post in March. "By all accounts he is close to and has a direct line to prime minister Albanese, which of course is a distinguishing feature for any ambassador—the throw-weight within one's own government."

In Australia, ex-Australian Strategic Policy Institute executive director Peter Jennings said Rudd had the three essential attributes required for the ambassadorship: the personal standing to have regular access to the White House, including the president; direct mobile phone access to the Australian prime minister; and to "be taken seriously by the American policy elite in congress, the Defence and State departments, the intelligence agencies and the think tanks."

As ambassador, Rudd will be expected to toe the line of Washington and Canberra, including giving full support to AUKUS and the revived Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)—the Tokyo leaders' summit of which Albanese rushed to attend just hours after being sworn into office in May.

In a statement accepting the ambassadorship, Rudd stressed his adherence to the Albanese government's intensification of the commitment to US militarism. He declared: "Our national interest continues to be served, as it has for decades past, by the deepest and most effective strategic engagement of the United States in our region."

Rudd also emphasised his array of connections in Washington. "Over the past decade, I have had the pleasure of building relationships with Republicans and Democrats across politics and have developed close personal ties with American business, civil society and the media," he said. His known friendships range from Biden's top Asia adviser, Kurt Campbell, to Paula Dobriansky, a Republican who

worked in senior positions for Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush and George W. Bush.

Also prominent in Rudd's relationships are figures who endorsed his March 2022 book, *The Avoidable War*, in which Rudd underscores his loyalty to the US but warns against a "catastrophic conflict" that could possibly involve a serious US defeat. These include former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and ex-NATO Supreme Allied Commander Admiral James Stavridis. On the book's front cover, Kissinger praises Rudd as "one of today's most thoughtful analysts of China's development."

In the book, Rudd cautions that a war between the US and China would be disastrous and destructive, and could give rise to unpredictable revolutionary convulsions, just as World War I triggered the 1917 Russian Revolution. He urges the US to accept "managed strategic competition" to give it more time to rebuild economically, rather than risk a war.

Rudd's views largely mirror those of Kissinger who has warned of the enormous dangers of war, while expressing the "hope" that this can be averted.

In the final analysis, however, neither in World War I nor World War II did the devastation to civilisation cause the US and other imperialist powers to pull back. In fact, the US dropped two atomic bombs at the end of World War II in order to assert its global hegemony. The dominant view in US ruling circles today is that managing "strategic competition" will only weaken the position of American imperialism, so it is necessary to act militarily.

Like Kissinger, Stavridis believes it is better for the US to secure its geopolitical domination without resorting to mass murder, if possible. In 2021 he co-authored a book, *2034: A Novel of the Next World War*, depicting how the conflict between the US and China could escalate into a nuclear world war costing tens of millions of lives. But if war could not be avoided, "we must be prepared to fight and win," he wrote in an op-ed in the *Washington Post*.

Such is the mission that Rudd will serve, on behalf of the Labor government and the Australian capitalist class, which has its own imperialist interests to defend and pursue in the Indo-Pacific. Whatever his misgivings and doubts about a Third World War, he will function as the loyal conduit for the plots and plans of Australian and US imperialism as Washington drives inexorably towards a catastrophic new global conflict.



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