

Bipartisan eulogies for Australian ex-general Jim Molan

Mike Head
18 January 2023

This week has seen nauseating eulogies, throughout Australia's political and media establishment, on the death of Liberal Party senator, ex-army general and ardent militarist Jim Molan. He died on Monday, aged 72, of prostate cancer.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese described Molan as “a man of principle and a politician of conviction” who “lived his life in service of our country.” Defence Minister Richard Marles declared Molan had been “a fierce advocate for our nation” with whom he held discussions on their “shared interest in national security.”

Liberal-National Opposition leader Peter Dutton hailed Molan as “a patriot, a decent, honourable man.” His Liberal Party deputy leader Sussan Ley said the parliament had “lost an intellectual giant.”

The *Australian's* foreign editor, Greg Sheridan, labelled Molan a “hero” and “army general turned politician.” In an editorial, the Murdoch newspaper praised him as “a disciplined leader and a strategic global thinker.”

Molan was one of the country's most prominent war hawks. He is notorious for his direct command role in the US devastation of Iraq, particularly the massacres and levelling of the city of Fallujah in 2004—which has been buried in all the media tributes.

In ruling circles, Molan was highly valued for his long record of ruthless service to their imperialist interests, and his strident advocacy of the need to take a similar approach to military, ideological and political preparations for a frontline role in a potentially catastrophic US war against China.

He was also a key figure, among others, in the increasing militarisation of Australia's political elite—one of a number of ex-military commanders elevated into parliament or high office over the past decade.

His service to Australian imperialism included being appointed as Australia's military attaché in Indonesia amid the 1998-99 economic crisis that ended the three-decade US-backed military dictatorship of General Suharto. Molan formed a close relationship with the brutal Kopassus (special forces) general Prabowo Subianto, Suharto's son-in-law, who is today Indonesia's defence minister.

Molan was then dispatched to Indonesian-ruled East Timor, where he urged military intervention in 1999 to back Timorese secession in order to protect Australian imperialist interests in the strategic and resource-rich half island. As a military officer, Molan clearly had political connections at the highest level. According to Sheridan's glowing tribute, “Jim advised then prime minister John

Howard over the phone that Australia should send in peacekeepers [to East Timor].”

In 2004, Molan was deployed to enforce the barbaric US occupation of Iraq, where he was installed as deputy chief of operations of coalition forces. That gave him direct command over the savage suppression of Iraqis who rose up against the occupation in cities such as Fallujah, Ramadi, Tal Afar, Karbala, Najaf and Basra, as well as in the working-class suburbs of Baghdad.

Under Molan's direction, the month-long siege of Fallujah became one of the most symbolic crimes of the ferocious US occupation. Until the 2003 invasion, Fallujah, home to the 300,000 people on the Euphrates River, was one of humanity's oldest continuous urban settlements, and known as the “city of mosques.” By the end of 2004, unknown thousands of people had been killed or had fled. The city was left a depopulated rubble. Of its 200 mosques, 60 were destroyed or damaged, along with some 39,000 homes and other buildings.

Reporters described systematic bombardments of civilian districts, the flattening of homes, the killing of injured people, and other war crimes, leaving the stench of rotting flesh. There is documented evidence of the use of illegal white phosphorous weapons. Marjorie Cohn, professor at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, noted that the attack began with an act contravening international law: “They [US forces] stormed and occupied the Fallujah General Hospital, and have not agreed to allow doctors and ambulances to go inside the main part of the city to help the wounded, in direct violation of the Geneva Conventions.”

After leaving the army in 2008, Molan became a frequent media commentator. He accused US and Australian governments of not sending sufficient forces to complete the repression in Iraq. In 2009, he agitated for the deployment of up to 6,000 Australian infantry and support troops to the war in Afghanistan, so they could be “blooded.” Subsequently, the Rudd-Gillard Labor governments of 2007 to 2013 sent troops to participate in the Obama administration's “surge” in Afghanistan, which led to further war crimes.

Molan cemented his place in the Liberal Party leadership by becoming one of the designers of its anti-refugee regime—Operation Sovereign Borders—involving the deployment of the military shrouded in secrecy to turn back refugee boats at the cost of unknown numbers of lives. He was Prime Minister Tony Abbott's “special envoy on operation sovereign borders” from

2013 to 2014, boasting in 2016 that it had set a “new normal” that was “leading the world.”

For his services, Molan was rewarded with a Liberal Party seat in the Senate, which he ultimately obtained in 2018, unelected, after the sitting member Fiona Nash was disqualified from parliament as part of a nationalist witch hunt to ban anyone from standing for election if they were possibly entitled to dual citizenship.

War agitation

Molan’s maiden speech gave voice to the underlying nationalist and warmongering agenda. He declared that China represented a direct, imminent and existential threat to Australia. He told the Senate, “we need to increase our self-reliance to manage strategic uncertainty through increased readiness, preparedness and all-round adaptability.”

He continued: “[A]n ascendant power, China, is challenging a status quo power, the US, in our region.” While “war with China or involving China is not inevitable,” war had been the outcome of 12 out of 16 alleged historical cases since the 1500s of conflict between “status quo” and “rising” powers.

Molan’s call for “self-reliance” was not at odds with the intensification of the military and strategic alliance with US imperialism. Instead, Molan regarded a vast expansion of Australia’s military, and the overcoming of popular opposition to war, as essential to reassure Washington that Australia is a dependable and capable ally.

In May 2021, echoing similar predictions by the incoming and outgoing commanders of the US Indo-Pacific Command, admirals John Aquilino and Phil Davidson, Molan declared that a war with China was “coming within three to five years.” To help ratchet up the anti-China propaganda, Molan produced a book, *Danger On Our Doorstep*, that depicted China as a present and growing threat throughout the Indo-Pacific region.

Molan agitated for far greater military spending and the restructuring of the economy for war. He declared as insufficient the Morrison Coalition government’s additional \$270 billion “investment” in military hardware over 10 years—taking total planned military spending to around \$575 billion for the decade.

Such demands inevitably mean further cutting social spending to finance the war effort, militarising production and suppressing dissent. Molan insisted it was necessary to overcome anti-war sentiment. He claimed that “complacency” could leave the country—and the “current crop of 18-19-year-olds” who would have to fight the war—unprepared for combat.

This campaigning meshed with that of the Biden administration, which declared its intent to “win the 21st century.” Biden ramped up Washington’s confrontation with China, which was initiated by the Obama administration and escalated under Trump, accusing Beijing of military aggression and human rights abuses throughout the Indo-Pacific.

This propaganda depicts China as the aggressor, when it is the US that is militarily encircling China. The Biden administration is forging new alliances against China, such as the AUKUS pact with the UK and Australia, and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad, involving the US, Japan, India and Australia, while maintaining the economic sanctions imposed on China under

Trump.

Molan’s glorification this week underscores the bipartisan nature of this agenda, which is also reflected in the broader elevation of military figures into positions of political power.

The Labor government’s ranks include Peter Khalil, an ex-defence department analyst, who was deployed to Baghdad in 2003 to work with the US occupation regime, serving as the Coalition Provisional Authority director of national security policy. Another Labor Iraq war participant was Mike Kelly, a former senior military lawyer who was dispatched to Washington in 2003 as a counter-insurgency legal expert. Kelly, a Rudd-Gillard government minister, quit parliament in 2020.

On the Coalition side, Andrew Hastie, a former SAS commander in Afghanistan, is now the shadow defence minister, and voicing concern about the difficulty in recruiting youth to join the military.

At the top of the state apparatus, David Hurley, Australia’s current governor-general, with potential dictatorial political and military powers, is a former chief of the armed forces, as was one of his recent predecessors, Peter Cosgrove.

Since scraping into office in May, the Albanese Labor government has stepped up the commitment to US-led war operations, including in Ukraine. The NATO proxy war against Russia is seen as a precursor to goading China into a similar disastrous conflict over Taiwan or other flashpoints, such as the South China Sea.

Even as it mourned Molan’s departure, the Labor government reinforced its commitment by confirming the purchase of 40 US Black Hawk helicopters for \$2.8 billion, and by sending 70 soldiers to train Ukrainian troops in Europe. Much more is to come in March, when the government will unveil the outcome of a military review and details of its AUKUS submarine purchases, which will cost at least \$10 billion each.

Molan was a vehement advocate of the Ukraine war and openly lamented Ukraine’s surrender of nuclear weapons after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. He also called for a much faster Australian acquisition of nuclear-powered attack submarines under the AUKUS agreement.

The adoration of Molan is another warning sign of preparations for conflicts that could threaten humanity with a devastating nuclear war. It underlines the necessity for students and young people to take up the fight to build an international anti-war movement. A global December 10 webinar of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality outlined the socialist perspective, based in the working class, for this struggle.



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