

Former Australian PM says “real risk” of war with China

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Speaking in the national parliamentary building on Thursday for the unveiling of a commemorative portrait of himself, former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd declared that there was a real threat of a major war in the near term. The possibility was no longer a hypothetical one, he said.

“We are in a region where the risk of crisis, conflict and war is real—not a theory, it’s a real threat,” Rudd declared. He said the situation was far more difficult than when he was prime minister, despite his tenure coinciding with the 2008–09 global financial crisis.

There were now “enormous structural factors,” including the development of “great power competition” in the Indo-Pacific region.

The latter comment, and the entire context of the remarks, demonstrated that Rudd was speaking of a possible war between the US, its allies including Australia, and China. The former Labor PM, who is Australia’s current ambassador to the US, wrote a book last year examining the prospect of such a conflict.

Given his history, connections and current position, Rudd is in a position to know of what he speaks. His comments are an indication of the planning and calculations taking place every day in the corridors of power, behind the backs of ordinary people.

They are a warning of what is being prepared by American imperialism, as it seeks to offset its economic decline through full-scale confrontation with China, which is viewed as its chief rival. Rudd’s comments underscore the extraordinary recklessness of the program being implemented by the current Labor government, of completing Australia’s transformation into a militarised, frontline state in such a conflict.

As striking as Rudd’s assessment of the danger of conflict was the banality of his advice to prevent it. Speaking in an almost meaningless jargon, Rudd said it was necessary for “our democracies to navigate our security circumstances with a level of care, intention, foresight, and with hard decisions to be made. That requires acute management and leadership by our leaders here in this parliament, in this government.”

The history of Rudd’s own government speaks against this line. Rudd was fully committed to US-led militarism and war. But in the early stages of the US confrontation with China, he

called for Washington to try to come to a modus vivendi with Beijing to mitigate against the prospect of all-out war. Rudd’s position was not anti-war in the slightest. Secret US cables published by WikiLeaks made plain he had declared that in the event of a war with China, his Labor government would participate.

But even his highly limited and tactical concerns were intolerable. As a consequence, in June 2010, Rudd was ousted as prime minister in a backroom coup orchestrated by Labor and trade union apparatchiks later revealed by further diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks to have been secret informants of the US embassy.

Julia Gillard, who replaced Rudd as prime minister, rapidly signed on to the US “pivot to Asia,” a vast military build-up openly aimed at preparing for war with China. More than a decade on, the militarisation is far advanced. The Labor government is proceeding with AUKUS, the Indo-Pacific war pact with the US and Britain, and not a single figure within the government or the Labor leadership has raised a word of criticism.

Rudd, meanwhile, has largely put his tactical differences back in his briefcase. As Australian ambassador to the US, he is involved every day in the implementation of AUKUS, alongside the political, diplomatic and military leaders of American imperialism. While pointing to the “risk” of war, his own activities and those of the Labor government are greatly increasing its likelihood.

This real program, of escalating the drive to war, not diminishing its dangers, was spelt out the very same day as Rudd’s remarks at a Canberra event of the Australian American Leadership Dialogue.

A keynote address was delivered by Republican congressman Mike Gallagher, who is co-founder of the Friends of Australia Caucus and co-chair of the AUKUS Working Group on Capitol Hill. Gallagher has also been appointed the chair of the House’s new select committee on the Chinese Communist Party, a McCarthyite body plotting provocations against Beijing and seeking to whip up a wartime atmosphere against it.

In Canberra, Gallagher declared: “The point is that the potential for AUKUS—from the undersea domain, to munitions

and critical technologies, to logistics—is limited only by our willpower and our imagination.” That is, AUKUS must be the focal point for war planning on every conceivable front.

According to the *Australian Financial Review*, Gallagher called for “greater investment in Australia’s logistical infrastructure, pre-positioned fuel and material and enhanced basing.” He declared: “Not only could these investments better defend Australia’s northern approaches, especially through enhanced sensing, they would reduce the odds of conflict in the first place.”

Of course, such logistics have nothing to do with defending northern Australia, which faces no conceivable threat from China or anyone else. Instead, the north of the continent is being transformed into a launching point for US-led activities throughout the Indo-Pacific, including in the event of conflict.

The centrepiece is the decision to station nuclear-capable US B-52 bombers near the northern city of Darwin. The war planes, which are central to US strike capabilities, require complex logistical support. Gallagher’s remarks were a call to escalate what is already underway, including the establishment of massive jet fuel tanks near Darwin, and the upgrading of air force runways and hangars to accommodate the bombers.

Gallagher shot back at any suggestion that the US would turn away from delivering three Virginia-class nuclear powered submarines to Australia under the AUKUS agreement. Some congresspeople previously warned that the US does not have the capacity to follow through, but Gallagher insisted they were wrong. While those craft will not arrive for up to a decade, US nuclear-submarines are already beginning enhanced operations from Australian ports.

Yet Gallagher insisted that there must be a quid pro quo. Australia would have to become a hub for US missile production. Such a program was unveiled late last month at the Australia-US Ministerial Consultations in Brisbane, but Gallagher insisted it must be a “crash program,” i.e., one that is rapidly accelerated.

This was underscored by events in Ukraine, where the US has for the past year waged a proxy war against Russia. A purported lack of munitions showed how rapidly a country could “go Winchester,” i.e., run out of available arms, in the event of a modern war with heavy fighting.

“Consequently, as much as Australia is relying on the US for submarine delivery, the US is likewise going to rely on Australia to codevelop and supplement our munitions stockpiles,” Gallagher declared.

While claiming that this militarisation would ensure “peace,” Gallagher presented this program in almost apocalyptic terms. “Such is the price of liberty,” he proclaimed. “For together, we are the beating heart of the free world, and if we don’t guard our God-given freedom from communist aggression, no one will.”

That specific rhetoric, including the absurd description of capitalist China as “communist,” is no doubt bound up with

Gallagher’s far-right Republican politics.

Whatever their trappings, however, it was clear that his comments were entirely in line with the program of the Biden administration. It too has presented the conflict with China in similar terms of a total war. That reflects not just the proclivities of individual politicians, but the historic crisis of American imperialism. As a formerly dominant power in decline, and one wracked by economic and social tensions, US capitalism increasingly sees no way out of its quagmire but through massive war aimed at eliminating all potential rivals.

The confluence between Gallagher’s presentation and the activities of the Biden administration was pointed to by the *Financial Review*. It noted that “his visit to Canberra for the annual dialogue fits neatly with America’s aim of weaving Australia even more tightly into what Gallagher has called ‘the existential struggle over what life will look like in the 21st century.’”

The Labor government has, since its election in May 2022, functioned as the most militarist and hawkish Australian administration in decades. It has accelerated Australia’s military build-up, while functioning as Washington’s chief diplomatic and geopolitical attack dog throughout the region.

Gallagher’s remarks show that even more is being demanded. That was also indicated by the enthusiastic reception his comments received from the *Australian’s* foreign editor Greg Sheridan. One of the country’s most prominent hawks, Sheridan, who has close ties to the US military and intelligence establishment, has in recent weeks accused Labor of not proceeding with the war drive as rapidly as required.

Gallagher’s comments are a warning to the working class. So too is the fact that they have received virtually no critical commentary from within the political and media establishment. That underscores the fact that the fight against war requires the independent mobilisation of the working class, in Australia and internationally, against all the governments and the capitalist system, the source of war.



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