

Washington's "Asia tsar": AUKUS makes Australia one of America's "closest partners"

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Kurt Campbell, currently the Indo-Pacific coordinator in US President Joseph Biden's National Security Council, used an interview in the *Australian* yesterday to declare that the AUKUS military pact between the US, UK and Australian governments elevated Australia to the top of the list of US allies. Australia was now in "the most rarefied air of America's closest partners."

Campbell's comments, given to Greg Sheridan, the Murdoch newspaper's militarist, pro-US international editor, are a blunt statement of how extensively the Australian political and military elite has tied the country's population to preparations for a potentially catastrophic US-led war against China. They are also a warning against any deviation from that commitment in the face of rising anti-war sentiment, especially among workers and youth.

There is widespread public outrage over the Albanese Labor government's allocation of up to \$368 billion for the purchase or manufacture of nuclear-powered attack submarines designed for use against China—and unknown billions more for hypersonic missiles and other weaponry. That has been exacerbated by Labor's escalating agreements for the basing of US military forces and stockpiling of long-range missiles, making Australia a crucial platform for an assault on China.

To underscore the significance of Campbell's remarks, Sheridan described him as "Biden's Asia tsar, having been assistant secretary for East Asia in Barack Obama's first administration." He was also "Australia's best friend in Washington" and "effective at the heart of power now for decades."

Campbell declared: "AUKUS is a fundamental statement about the future, about confidence to remain strategically aligned and intertwined for decades." He added: "It's not an exaggeration to say that AUKUS has fundamentally shifted and accelerated the very course of the US-Australian alliance."

This is another indicator of how far the Labor government, working hand-in-glove with the Biden administration, has intensified the integration of Australia's military and, increasingly, its economy, into the war drive against China, as well as against Russia in Ukraine.

Campbell was an architect, along with Hillary Clinton, of the Obama administration's "pivot" to the Asia-Pacific, to deploy

60 percent of US military forces and refocus Washington's entire geo-strategic orientation to the region to confront China as the main threat to the global hegemony asserted by the US after World War II. That "pivot" was formally unveiled by Obama on the floor of the Australian parliament in 2011, courtesy of the Gillard Labor government, which also signed up to the rotational basing of US Marines in the strategic northern city of Darwin.

Since narrowly scraping into office in May 2022, Albanese's government has gone far further, and well beyond what the Liberal-National Coalition government did between 2013 and 2022.

Campbell emphasised the shift being made by the US to prepare for war against China. "The US is in the process of a long-term reorientation of its military investments more towards long-range capabilities relevant to the vast Indo-Pacific than capabilities more geared to the military challenges of the Middle East and South Asia. This is a massive endeavour that will place substantial demands on the navy and air power."

Biden's "Asia tsar" insisted that this realignment required a "larger determination" by the US and its allies to prevail in the "strategic competition" across the region. That is in line with the demands coming from Washington for the Labor government to further increase its military spending and undertakings to the US for frontline involvement in a war against China.

Campbell particularly singled out the South Pacific, where the US, "in partnership with Australia, New Zealand and other friends, must step up its game." The Albanese government has willingly acted as a regional bully, warning island states such as Solomon Islands against links with China, but more is being demanded by Washington.

Outlining what he regarded as US successes in its anti-China partnerships, Campbell listed AUKUS alongside the Quad alliance with Japan, India and Australia, "enhanced defence spending and 'strike' agreements for Tomahawk (missiles) with Japan," enhanced cyber partnerships around the region, renewed security partnerships with the Philippines, "strong and unprecedented Indo-Pacific support for Ukraine" and, "perhaps most importantly, the unambiguous step-up in technology and defence partnership with India."

Clearly, however, AUKUS ranked as the among the most important pacts in this “rarefied air” of close support for the US.

Reinforcing Campbell’s message, Sheridan wrote: “As with the Second World War, our security rests on US leadership.” Both he and Campbell presented AUKUS as an agreement to prevent a war with China by “building deterrence.” This was AUKUS’s “single purpose,” Sheridan claimed.

That is false. As with all war preparations, for political and ideological purposes they are depicted as defensive. In reality, the US military build-up is part of an aggressive campaign of tightening economic sanctions, diplomatic provocations—especially over Taiwan—military encirclement and ever-larger military exercises to goad the Chinese regime into a disastrous conflict, in a similar fashion to that triggered by the US and NATO against Russia.

Along with Campbell, Sheridan also interviewed another participant in the Australian American Leadership Dialogue (AALD), an annual closed-door event just held in Canberra. Obsequiously, Sheridan hailed Hawaii-based Marine Lieutenant General Stephen Sklenka, the deputy commander of US forces in the Indo-Pacific, as “an intellectual and a soldier.”

Sklenka made two points. One was that “Australian geography was important in World War II” and “geography doesn’t change.” In other words, just as Australia became a crucial base for the war against Japan, it had to serve that function again against China.

Sklenka’s second missive was: “The survival of the force requires the dispersal of the force.” That is, the survival of US forces in a war against China—almost certainly fought with nuclear weapons—depended on Australia.

The general gave some idea of US-Australian military integration already underway. “US-Australia military cooperation is always growing, always increasing,” he said. “The interoperability and collaborative actions of our forces are increasing. On exercises they’re almost extensions of each other.”

If these remarks are being made public, no doubt much more was discussed confidentially at the AALD gathering. It “brings together Australian and American leaders from government, enterprise, media, education and the community to help review and refine the parameters of the Australian-American bilateral relationship,” according to the AALD website.

Another AALD participant, US Republican Mike Gallagher, the chair of a congressional committee on China, last week circulated his AALD dinner speech to the media. In it, he called for a “crash program” of long-range missile production in Australia and “greater investment in Australia’s logistical infrastructure, pre-positioned fuel and material and enhanced basing.”

Kurt Campbell’s interview yesterday is far from his first such political intervention. In July, he told a public seminar in Washington on the strategic and military implications of

AUKUS of his fear that “not very many years ago,” Australia “flirted” with a “different kind of orientation” with China.

Australian Financial Review international editor James Curran commented: “Coming from the chief American architect of AUKUS and the author of the Obama-era US ‘pivot’ to Asia, the comments reveal anxiety among some US officials that such drift might reoccur.”

In 2010, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was removed and replaced by Julia Gillard via an inner-Labor Party coup orchestrated by US informants. Rudd, while a loyal supporter of the US alliance, had suggested that the Obama White House should accommodate China’s rise somewhat to avoid war.

That was totally unacceptable to the Obama administration as it prepared to launch the “pivot to Asia”—an all-sided confrontation with China. Today, there is absolutely no doubt about the Albanese government’s unconditional alignment behind US war planning. But there is fear in ruling circles of the growing anti-war sentiment.

Media polls indicate that hostility to the war plans has strengthened as the Labor government has ramped them up. The latest poll, conducted earlier this year by Essential Research, reported 90 percent support for the proposition that the prime minister must get approval from parliament before making a decision to go to war.

Last week, nevertheless, the Albanese government rejected any suggestion of parliamentary approval, insisting that unfettered war powers must stay in the hands of the prime minister and the cabinet’s national security committee.

Such media polling is only a distorted expression of the anti-war feeling. As proven by historical experience, the parliamentary establishment will not oppose war. It is part of the capitalist state apparatus, dominated by the parties that defend the profit interests of the Australian ruling class, which depend heavily on US backing.

There is only one way to stop the danger of a third world war and a nuclear cataclysm. That is the development of a unified mass movement of the working class, in Australia, the US, China and internationally, against all the governments involved—including those of Biden and Albanese—and the capitalist profit system itself, the source of war.



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