

Poll shows majority of Australians oppose participating in US-China conflict

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Poll results this week provided a glimpse into the gulf that separates popular sentiment from the militarist warmongering of the Australian ruling class. Under conditions where the Labor government has transformed Australia into a frontline state for a US-led war against China, the vast mass of ordinary people are hostile to participation in such a conflict.

These sentiments are almost always hidden and buried by the political and media establishment. They only surfaced in the context of a discussion within ruling circles over the global implications of last week's victory of Donald Trump in the US presidential election.

The Resolve poll, conducted after the win by the fascist Trump, noted: "In reaction to Donald Trump's election, some people have suggested Australia should consider certain aspects of its relationship with the US." It then posed a series of questions, with respondents asked to indicate agreement, disagreement or neutrality/uncertainty.

The most significant question, and response, was whether "Australia should avoid taking sides in any conflict between the US and China." An overwhelming 57 percent of participants agreed, i.e., they opposed Australia joining such a conflict.

Some 27 percent indicated uncertainty or neutrality and just 16 percent disagreed with the statement. The way in which the statement was posed means it is impossible to know what proportion of that 16 percent was indicating support for aligning with the US and how many were in favour of backing China.

Other questions similarly pointed to hostility to war, though less decisively. One statement was "Australia should rethink its plans to host US nuclear powered submarines at Australian naval bases." Around 37 percent agreed with that, 34 percent were unsure or neutral and 29 percent were opposed.

Similarly, 44 percent agreed "that Australia should form

closer relations with other countries in our region, including China," with just 17 percent opposed. Asked about ending or pausing the AUKUS program for Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines from the US, 27 percent were in favour, with 35 percent indicating that the plan should continue, but the plurality, 38 percent, stating neutrality or uncertainty.

The polling, though inherently limited, gives a hint of broader public sentiment. The questions in this poll on foreign policy were more interesting than is usually the case, but only went so far. The question that came the closest to the reality of what the world faces—a military conflict between the US and China—showed the most overwhelming response.

One can imagine that the outcome would have been even more decisive in response to a question along the lines of, "Do you support Australia's involvement in a war drive that threatens tens of millions of deaths, or a nuclear exchange that would end human civilisation?"

The mixed and conflicting responses to some of the statements undoubtedly express a degree of popular confusion which is hardly surprising. What is more striking is how clearly the response to a question on a US-China conflict was at odds with what has been pushed relentlessly by the Australian establishment for well over a decade.

The necessity of aligning Australia with the US-led confrontation with China has been the keystone policy of the Labor government, since its election in May, 2022. That has included not only the AUKUS acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines, but a vast expansion of US basing, including offensive assets, across the country.

Labor is presiding over the largest build-up of the Australian military since World War II, focussed on the procurement of missiles and other strike capabilities for all branches of the defence force. This is explicitly based on the need for the military to be able to deploy

“impactful projection” throughout the region because of the likelihood of war in the Indo-Pacific.

Labor’s militarist offensive builds on policies enacted by governments since 2011. In that year, then Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard signed up to a US “pivot to Asia,” a vast US military build-up and diplomatic and economic offensive against China announced by President Barack Obama from the floor of the Australian parliament. Ever since, successive governments have deepened Australia’s involvement in the US drive to war against China, which is viewed as the chief threat to American imperialist hegemony.

The population has been systematically kept in the dark about the implications of this program. Australia has been placed on the frontlines of a war that would almost inevitably involve nuclear weapons without the semblance of a popular debate or discussion.

What has occurred instead has been a protracted propaganda barrage aimed at demonising China and legitimising the militarist policies. This has involved every section of the media, from the state-funded Australian Broadcasting Corporation through to the right-wing Murdoch press.

The *Sydney Morning Herald*, which published the Resolve poll, has itself been at the forefront of the rabid anti-China campaign.

In one notorious example, which indicates how long the witch-hunt has been going, the *Herald’s* international editor Peter Hartcher called in 2016 for a campaign against “rats, flies mosquitoes and sparrows,” supposedly aiding Chinese “interference” in Australia. In addition to political figures insufficiently vehement in their denunciations of Beijing, vulnerable Chinese international students are targeted. Similar xenophobic filth continues to be churned out to this day.

Despite the debasement of the political and cultural atmosphere, the latest poll results indicate a substantial anti-war sentiment.

Those implications have not been the subject of much public discussion. The exception is a layer of former politicians who have criticised AUKUS from the standpoint that it does not advance the interests of Australian imperialism and jeopardises Australia’s economic reliance on trade with China.

Former Prime Minister Paul Keating, for instance, issued a statement noting: “These polling numbers, taken by a reputable pollster on a large sample, make completely clear that the public does not endorse any military engagement by Australia as party to a military

dispute arising between the United States and China.”

Keating added that the popular views were “utterly at odds with the military commitment the Albanese government has made to allow the US to base four nuclear attack class submarines in Perth and seven or eight nuclear armed B-52 bombers south of Darwin.” These policies had been implemented without the “explicit agreement of the Australian community—a community that was never consulted as these lock-in arrangements were put into place.”

All of that is true, but Keating and others like him who advocate a more “independent” Australian foreign policy offer no alternative. All they propose is a variation of the existing military build-up and the option for a future government to choose whether or not to participate in a major war when it breaks out, rather than making commitments ahead of time.

The Resolve polling itself, predictably put the issue in nationalist terms, as a question of what “Australia” should do in relation to the geopolitical storms, but the results themselves point to the reality that there are two “Australias,” as there are in every country, with the fundamental divide being along class lines.

While masses of working people are hostile to war, and the vast sums squandered on the military, governments everywhere are turning to a program of militarism in response to the breakdown of capitalism. Trump’s victory is one expression of that breakdown. So too are the other fronts in the developing global war—the genocidal Israeli onslaught on Gaza, now extended to Lebanon, and the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. Figures such as Keating either support the wars that are underway, or remain silent on them.

The real alternative is not a tactical alteration of imperialist foreign policy, but the development of an internationally-unified movement of the working class, against war, imperialism and every capitalist government. That means a fight for international socialism.



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