

# Australian naval personnel involved in US sinking of Iranian ship: Oppose the pro-imperialist Labor government and war against Iran!

Socialist Equality Party (Australia)

7 March 2026

The Labor government has confirmed that three Australian naval personnel were aboard the US nuclear attack submarine that torpedoed an Iranian frigate off the coast of Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean on Wednesday. The attack without warning on the unarmed vessel, in international waters, was a monstrous war crime that claimed at least 140 lives.

The Socialist Equality Party (Australia) unequivocally denounces this act of mass murder. The involvement of Australian personnel directly implicates the Albanese Labor government in an atrocity that violates international law and that recalls nothing so much as the lawless military operations of the Nazis.

The SEP demands the investigation of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Defence Minister Richard Marles, Foreign Minister Penny Wong and other senior Labor leaders on charges of war crimes, along with the top Australian military command.

Above all, we call on all workers and young people to condemn and oppose this war crime. Without even a semblance of public discussion, much less a mandate, the Labor government has joined not only the criminal attack in the Indian Ocean, but the broader war of which it is a part.

That war is one of unbridled neo-colonialism. The US and Israel are virtually carpet-bombing Iran, a country of more than 90 million people, in an effort to terrorise the population through mass murder, decapitate its government and establish a puppet regime beholden to Washington.

The presence of Australian naval personnel on the US submarine only concretises the craven and immediate support of the Labor government for the war launched by Israel and the US on February 28. Albanese was among the first world leaders to explicitly endorse this war of aggression and has declared that he fully supports these criminal US “objectives.”

Labor’s involvement is inseparable from its role as a key partner of American imperialism, not only in the Middle East, but globally, particularly in the preparations for a catastrophic

war against China.

The Australian personnel were working on the US submarine as part of the militarist AUKUS pact between the US, the UK and Australia, directed against China. In the lead-up to Australia’s acquisition of a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines from the US under AUKUS, between 50 and 100 Australian naval personnel have been deployed throughout America’s own fleet of nuclear attack subs for “training.”

The circumstances of the attack on the Iranian vessel are a chilling warning of what the Australian personnel are training for, not only against Iran, but against China.

The sunken Iranian ship, the IRIS Dena, was in the region to participate in the International Fleet Review 2026 and the multinational exercise MILAN 2026, to which it had been invited by India, along with 73 other countries including the US and Australia. The rules of the exercise included the ships carry no munitions.

Departing those events and sailing in international waters, the IRIS Dena was thus unarmed, as the US was well aware. It was a comparatively tiny frigate, which, the WSWs noted yesterday, “displaced 1,500 tons—one-sixth the displacement of a single American destroyer. It was 94 meters long, powered by four domestically produced Iranian diesel engines.”

The vessel and its crew posed no threat to anyone. They were not engaged in hostilities or anywhere near the scene of armed conflict. The attack on them was an entirely cowardly assault by the world’s largest military superpower.

US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth boasted about the mass murder, declaring: “This was never meant to be a fair fight, and it is not a fair fight. We are punching them while they’re down, which is exactly how it should be.” Such statements and actions are indistinguishable from those of the Nazis.

The cowardly nature of the attack has been matched by the cowardly response of the Australian government, which sought to hide its role.

Albanese and its other leaders have said nothing about the

vile character of the attack or its illegality. Albanese has repeatedly declared over the past week that the legality or otherwise of the war is simply a matter for the US and Israel. In plain terms, that means Australia supports the war of aggression against Iran that is in clear breach of international law, as well as all the associated US and Israeli war crimes.

Labor's immediate response to questions of Australian involvement was to declare it would not "confirm" where in the world Australian troops might be. The government only acknowledged the presence of three Australian personnel on the US submarine after leaks to the media.

Now government representatives are claiming there are "guardrails" in place when Australian personnel operate aboard US vessels. Albanese absurdly suggested that the Australian personnel sequestered themselves in their quarters during the attack and did not participate.

Even if true, this would change nothing. In this unlikely scenario: Australian sailors integrated into the American crew carry out vital work in the lead-up to the sneak attack, then repair to their bunks to cover their eyes and ears like the wise monkeys who see and hear no evil.

Other questions arise. Australian personnel on US vessels are still formally under the command of the Australian military. That means that if the submarine was preparing to engage in hostilities that would directly implicate Australia in the war on Iran, they would have been obliged to contact their command.

If that occurred, the military command and the Australian government was aware that a war crime was about to be committed before it occurred. If not, the Labor government has given carte blanche for Australian personnel to participate in whatever military operations the Pentagon decides, regardless of their criminality.

The involvement of Australian military personnel in the sinking of the IRIS Dena under the Albanese government is another chilling demonstration of the Labor Party's blood-soaked history as an instrument of imperialist war and reaction. Workers and young people, horrified by the onslaught against Iran, must take up the most determined political struggle against the Labor government.

Reject the arguments of the Greens, who criticise elements of the war, but present Labor as a hapless party being dragged along by the US. In reality, Labor is fully on board with the US-led war in the Middle East and preparations for war against China, as the means of prosecuting the interests of Australian imperialism.

The Greens' calls for a more "independent" foreign policy are a nationalist trap which goes hand-in-hand with its demands for the build-up of "sovereign" military capabilities such as Australian-made missiles and drones.

The pseudo-left organisations, such as Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance, are no less politically culpable. They parrot the calls of the Greens for a more "independent" foreign policy, which represents the interests, not of workers, but of a

minority of the ruling class fearful of the implications for Australian capitalism of the US plunge into war.

And now, as they have throughout the Israeli genocide in Gaza, the pseudo-left groups call only for more protests, based on moral appeals to the very Labor government that is complicit in the US-Israeli mass murder in the Middle East and wider US imperialist thuggery.

The pseudo-left, and the trade union bureaucracy for whom they cover, are seeking to corral workers and youth behind a political establishment hurtling towards imperialist barbarism and dictatorship. Their claims that Labor could be pressured to "the left" only serve to cover up its relentless march to the right, including its turn to police-state repression at home directed against opposition to the genocide and to war more broadly.

The Socialist Equality Party, as the Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, insists that workers and youth must strike out on a new political path. The genocide and the war in Iran are not isolated developments. They are part of a developing Third World War, driven by the breakdown of the capitalist system itself.

What is required is a political movement of the working class, independent of all of the pro-capitalist and nationalist parties. As the ICFI has elaborated, such a movement must be international in scope, must mobilise the vast social and political power of the working class, and be aimed at abolishing the profit system that is the source of war and reorganising society on socialist lines.

We urge workers and young people to take up this perspective and contact the SEP to join it today.

**Contact the SEP:**

Phone: (02) 8218 3222

Email: [sep@sep.org.au](mailto:sep@sep.org.au)

Facebook: [SocialistEqualityPartyAustralia](https://www.facebook.com/SocialistEqualityPartyAustralia)

Twitter: [@SEP\\_Australia](https://twitter.com/SEP_Australia)

Instagram: [socialistequalityparty\\_au](https://www.instagram.com/socialistequalityparty_au)

TikTok: [@sep\\_australia](https://www.tiktok.com/@sep_australia)



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**