

Australia's militarist Anzac Day held amid global eruption of war

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This year's militarist Anzac Day celebration coincided with an eruption of imperialist war that Australia, under the Labor government, is centrally involved in.

Anzac Day marks the disastrous 1915 landing of Australian, New Zealand and British troops at Gallipoli, Turkey, amid World War I. Notwithstanding the government's glorification of the landing at Gallipoli, it was a catastrophe from start to finish, the result of the reckless decisions of British and Australian military leadership. Up to 50,000 Allied troops and more than 85,000 Turkish soldiers lost their lives in a battle that was supposed to be a surprise attack but dragged on for more than eight months.

Now 111 years later, Australia is participating in a new criminal war in that region of the world, the US-led assault on Iran, which threatens to ignite a global conflagration.

Widely reviled amid the mass hostility to the Vietnam War, Anzac Day has been heavily promoted by governments since the 1980s and 90s, a period coinciding with unending US-led wars that are now metastasising into a direct confrontation of American imperialism with nuclear-armed states, Russia and China.

The lead-up to Anzac Day was more muted than in previous years. In his statements on Saturday, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese trotted out the usual lines about the military having "embodied all that is greatest in our national character." But he said nothing about the role of the military in conflicts that are underway today.

The reason for the vagueness is that there is widespread anti-war sentiment. A Newspoll last month found that 72 percent of the population opposed the US attack on Iran. Over more than two years, there have been mass protests opposing the Israeli genocide in Gaza and the Labor government's support for it.

Even among the crowds that gathered, which were many times smaller than the largest of those

demonstrations, there were glimmers of popular anti-war sentiment. Roy Pearson, a 99-year-old veteran of World War II told the *Sydney Morning Herald*, "War never solves anything. We need to wake up to ourselves."

Labor's Defence Minister Richard Marles, an ardent war hawk, also said little about current events. But he did declare: "Approximately 1,250 Australian Defence Force personnel are currently deployed on operations across Australia, the Indo-Pacific region and the globe. These deployments are an example of the continuing Anzac spirit while serving Australia's national interests."

Those deployments point to Australia's integration into a US-led war machine that menaces the entire world.

Among those deployed are more than a hundred troops, permanently based with US forces in the United Arab Emirates. Last month, they were joined by 85 more personnel, who accompanied an advanced war command airplane that could be used to target US strikes on Iran, and air-to-air missiles. The same month, 90 Special Forces soldiers were also posted to the region, undoubtedly preparing to participate in a ground invasion of Iran if it occurs.

The character of these operations was demonstrated, not by the nauseating references to "national character" and the "Anzac spirit," but by US President Donald Trump's threats to return Iran to the "stone age" and to end its civilisation entirely.

Marles gave no breakdown of the deployments, but every branch of the Australian military is heavily involved in a vast US-led military build-up aimed at preparing for an aggressive war against China.

Little over a week before Anzac Day, Marles released the 2026 National Defence Strategy, which centres on maritime conflict and strike capability, including missiles and drones, which it explicitly connects to confrontation with China. Military spending, already at a record of almost \$60 billion a year, is being increased by a further

\$53 billion over the decade.

While government leaders avoid speaking about the implications of what they are preparing, the reality of plans for a major war were spelt out bluntly by former secretary of the Home Affairs department, Mike Pezzullo.

In a comment published by the Murdoch-owned *Australian* and the hawkish Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Pezzullo bemoaned the fact that “Australians tend to frame war in moral terms and as something that is in our past.” The former senior official warned that the “solemnity” of Anzac Day, and an emphasis on the horrors of war undermined “The idea of the utility and necessity of war.”

Speaking about his willingness to sacrifice the new generations of young people he continued:

“Will we have the fortitude to calculate the odds of war and to prepare accordingly, even as we abhor war? Will we have the moral clarity to calculate the cost of war and the price of peace? Will we be prepared to make the same sacrifices that we rightly honour on Saturday, for the sake of future generations?”

“Odds are, we may be tested soon enough.”

He denounced Russian President Vladimir Putin. But the main target of the diatribe was China. Pezzullo repeated all of the US talking points, falsely depicting Beijing as an aggressor and declared, “For Australia’s part, we are not doing nearly enough to prepare for the possibility of a war in the Pacific in the near term.”

An editorial in the *Australian Financial Review* (AFR) was more restrained, but made the same basic point.

Bemoaning potential delays to the AUKUS program for Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines from the US, directed against China, it stated that, “Waiting for big military hardware to arrive appears to be preparing to fight the last war, as asymmetric and autonomous weapons revolutionise warfare.” The AFR welcomed Labor’s emphasis on the rapid acquisition of drones, which have been central to the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, but called for such programs to be accelerated further.

In other words, under conditions where the central policy of the Labor government since 2022 has been to complete Australia’s transformation into a frontline state for war against China, including with vastly expanded US basing and the largest build-up of the military in decades, far more is being demanded.

In what could become a defining element of this year’s Anzac Day, was the decision of Victoria Cross recipient,

Ben Roberts-Smith, to attend an Anzac Day event on Queensland’s Gold Coast. He appears to have been given a warm welcome by most in the small crowd, while media outlets, including the publicly funded Australian Broadcasting Corporation, published respectful articles citing Roberts-Smith’s comments about his passion for Anzac Day.

It’s less than three weeks since Roberts-Smith was criminally charged with five war crimes, for his alleged involvement in the murder of multiple Afghans. That includes accusations that Roberts-Smith machine gunned a disabled Afghan prisoner to death and kicked a civilian off a cliff.

War crimes committed by Australian forces in Afghanistan flowed inexorably from the neo-colonial and criminal character of the occupation itself. The official claims that governments and the military command were unaware of the atrocities that were carried out are not credible.

Even in that context though, the ability of Roberts-Smith to make public appearances and to be treated politely by the press, as an accused serial murderer, is disturbing and a marker of a shift to the right by the entire political and media establishment.

Meanwhile, there is overwhelming anti-war sentiment among workers and young people, which is intersecting with anger over a cost-of-living and social crisis that has been intensified over recent weeks by the price hikes triggered by the war on Iran. The urgent task is to transform those sentiments into an anti-war movement, based on the social and political power of the working class and a socialist perspective directed against the source of war, the capitalist system.



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