

Australia Must Stop Beating the Drums of War Against China

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Defence Minister Peter Dutton and Home Affairs Secretary Mike Pezzullo have been brazenly beating the war drums in the latest round of verbal aggression against China. They have escalated the federal Coalition government’s anti-China propaganda to a dangerous new level.

In his [ANZAC Day message](#), Pezzullo invoked Cold War speeches of United States general Douglas MacArthur and US president and former general Dwight D Eisenhower.

“On this ANZAC Day, in the 70th year of our principal military alliance, let us remember the warnings of two American generals who had known war waged totally, and brutally: we must search always for the chance for peace amidst the curse of war, until we are faced with the only prudent, if sorrowful, course — to send off, yet again, our warriors to fight the nation’s wars.

“Let there not be doubt — war shakes confidence in a civilisation’s soul. Who could begrudge the sorrow of Europeans after the horror of the First World War? Yet, in their sorrow and their revulsion at the thought of another terrible bloodbath, they did not heed the drums of war which beat through the 1930s — until too late they once again took up arms against Nazism and Fascism.

“Today, as free nations again hear the beating drums and watch worryingly the militarisation of issues that we had, until recent years, thought unlikely to be catalysts for war, let us continue to search unceasingly for the chance for peace while bracing again, yet again, for the curse of war.

“By our resolve and our strength, by our preparedness of arms, and by our statecraft, let us get about reducing the likelihood of war — but not at the cost of our precious liberty. War might well be folly, but the greater folly is to wish away the curse by refusing to give it thought and attention, as if in so doing, war might leave us be, forgetting us perhaps.”

‘Prepared for action’

While Pezzullo did not name China in his overblown speech, the target of his war-drum beating was [made explicit](#) by Dutton.

He said that Australia was already under cyber attack and that a war with China over Taiwan cannot be discounted. He added that the armed forces were “prepared for action” and the [leaked speech](#) to special forces troops by then-special forces commander Major-General Adam Findlay from April 2020 appears to confirm this war footing.

He claimed that “everyday Australians” were with the government against China’s aggression because “they know that what we are saying is factually based”.

These two war drummer would have the public think that this is some heroic defence of democratic values in response to some recent challenge from China. However, the truth is that the US and Australia have been building up readiness for war against China for years.

New arms race

From the “pivot to Asia” under the Barack Obama administration, to the Force Posture Agreement, Australia has been complicit in a major military build-up against China. The US shifted 60% of its navy to the Pacific (an increase of 10%), US marines were based in Darwin and US military aircraft were given access to Australian bases in the Northern Territory.

But there was also the development of a new aggressive military doctrine aimed at China, as former US army captain John Ford noted in a [2017 article](#) in The Diplomat where he argued that the pivot was a provocation to China.

“Emblematic of this mistake was the roll-out of the Air-Sea Battle doctrine. First outlined in a then-classified memo in 2009, ASB became official doctrine in 2010. From the beginning, it was an effort to develop an operational doctrine for a possible military confrontation with China and then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates openly discussed the need to counter China’s growing military capabilities.

“The signal received in Beijing was the United States had hostile intentions toward China and was trying to contain it militarily. The result was that the entire pivot was seen by Beijing as part of a broader effort to encircle China.”

Essentially, the US (with Australia’s support under Coalition and Labor governments) has been working to bolster its military encirclement of China and preserve its imperialist military dominance.

Military spending spree

As part of the imperialist anti-China military build up, the federal government is on a \$270 billion military spending spree which is great business for major arms manufacturers. Investigative reports published by [Michael West Media](#) have exposed the rapacious padding and consistent blow-outs of military contracts.

“Australian governments and their defence leaders, with help from lobbyists, choose immensely complex, overpriced and overmanned weaponry,” wrote Brian Toohey in one of these [articles](#).

“With the blow-out in the budget expected to hit nearly \$1 trillion by 2023-24 as a result of the pandemic, one would think the Federal Government would crack down on wasteful spending. But when it comes to defence spending, too much is never enough.

“Budget papers show defence funding will grow by a staggering 9.1% in real terms to \$42.7 billion this current financial year. But much of the extra money will be wasted — yet again.

“There’s the official cost to build nine Hunter class frigates, which has gone from \$30 billion in 2016 to \$45.6 billion in 2020.

“Then there’s the army’s new Infantry Fighting Vehicles, estimated to cost a ‘mind-boggling’ \$18-27 billion. The mid-point estimate for the cost of each vehicle is \$50 million.

“Then there’s the sustainment (running) costs for the Super Hornet and the Growler jets — a scandalous \$100,000 per hour. This compares to \$15,000 an hour for the older Hornets which still perform well.

“But taking the cake is the planned build of 12 ludicrously expensive Attack class submarines – a program that is a financial and capability disaster. The cost has already gone from \$50 billion in 2016 to \$90 billion.”

ASPI and the arms industry

Marcus Reubenstein on April 3 [reported](#) on the government’s announcement that it would spend a further billion dollars on acquiring new missiles. He also noted that the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), which played a major role in both promoting arms spending and the anti-China campaign, also had major sponsorship from the arms industry.

“Since ASPI’s inception it has received sponsorship from 12 manufacturers of weapons and weapons systems. Over that period, they have been awarded 9423 Defence Department contracts with a total value of \$51.2 billion.”

Perhaps because of this relationship, ASPI “estimates” that Australia will spend \$100 billion over the next 20 years buying missiles and guided weapons!

The US-Australia war alliance and the corrupt links between government and the arms industry are taking us ever closer to a horrific imperialist war. It will also incite more anti-Asian racism. Racism and a vote-buying budget are shaping up as core elements of Scott Morrison’s re-election bid.

For all these reasons, the trade union movement and all progressive social movements must urgently resist the reactionary drive to war with China.

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Peter Boyle is a member of the [Socialist Alliance](#) National Executive.

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