

Australian foreign minister visits Ukraine, backs US war against Russia

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Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong toured Kyiv on Wednesday, in her first visit to the Ukrainian capital since the war with Russia began in February 2022. She announced that Australia will reopen its Kyiv embassy, which was shuttered shortly after the conflict started, and touted Australia's backing for the Ukrainian regime.

The visit was a hawkish and militarist one. Wong declared her Labor government's ironclad commitment to what is essentially a US-NATO war against Russia, with Ukraine serving as a proxy. Her trip coincided with, and was part of, yet another escalation of this conflict, including increasingly direct NATO interventions against Moscow, which threaten a nuclear war in Europe.

Inevitably, Wong couched her trip in terms of the defence of Ukrainian "freedom" and "democracy." Such statements, always hypocritical from imperialist leaders, can only be described as nauseating under conditions where all the major governments, including Wong's own, are supporting the Israeli mass murder of Palestinians in Gaza.

The depiction of the conflict, moreover, is an entirely false one. The US deliberately provoked Russia's reactionary invasion, and has since stoked the war, with a perspective of inflicting a strategic defeat on Moscow, even though it is costing hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian lives. By some estimates, half a million people on both sides have perished in little over two years.

Ukraine is not a democracy, but a police state, where scheduled elections have been suspended and martial law imposed. In her paeans to freedom, Wong predictably said nothing about the country's growing number of political prisoners, including young Trotskyist leader Bogdan Syrotiuk, who is jailed on trumped up charges of treason for advancing a socialist perspective aimed at uniting Russian and Ukrainian workers and ending the carnage.

In addition to the embassy reopening, Wong announced an additional \$76 million in aid, including \$10 million for

Ukraine's energy sector and \$66 million for "reconstruction and recovery" efforts. While presented as benign, energy subsidies have military implications in the context of ongoing hostilities. The "recovery" fund is being transferred to the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, overseen by the major European powers, who are seeking to profit from the conflict.

The spends took Australian assistance since the war began to more than \$1.5 billion. Over \$1 billion of that is in direct military aid, contributing to the disastrous war, including the provision of ever more openly offensive weaponry.

During a trip to Ukraine in April, Defence Minister Richard Marles committed to providing air defence systems capable of shooting down aircraft, as well as drones. Australia has also provided surplus rifles, some of which have likely gone to Ukraine's fascist militia, as well as armoured vehicles. Australia participated in a British-led program to train Ukrainian recruits and previously deployed a surveillance aircraft to the region.

Wong's visit occurred amid intensive preoccupation by the European powers with the Ukraine war. There appears to be an atmosphere of uncertainty associated with the election of fascist demagogue Donald Trump as US president.

During the election campaign, Trump claimed that he could end the war rapidly. This was a cynical attempt to capitalise on anti-war sentiment. It also reflected differences within the US political establishment over foreign policy. Both sides in the debate support an overarching strategy of reversing the decline of American imperialism, by establishing hegemony over the vast Eurasian landmass.

That program means conflict with Russia and China. While the Democrats have insisted on the de facto war with Russia as a key stepping stone to conflict with China, Trump and others have at times promoted a turn away

from the Ukraine conflict and a full focus on confrontation with Beijing.

The current balance of forces within the US foreign policy establishment is unclear, as is what Trump will do when he is inaugurated on January 20. Since the election, he has been briefed by Biden and others on the major escalation of the Ukraine war by the current administration, including permission for Ukraine to strike targets within Russia using US and NATO munitions.

Nevertheless, there seems to be an attempt by proponents of the war to establish facts on the ground by ramping up the conflict further. The European powers are also playing an even more direct role than previously.

The day before Wong arrived in Ukraine, the Ukrainian secret service assassinated Igor Anatolyevich Kirillov, the Russian lieutenant general in charge of its nuclear and chemical defense forces, in a bombing outside his home in Moscow.

French President Emmanuel Macron has touted the possibility of NATO troops being deployed to Ukraine as “peacekeepers,” in the event of some sort of ceasefire. Even if there is a truce in direct hostilities, the presence of NATO soldiers on Russia’s border, under conditions where the imperialist powers have made plain their intention to overthrow Putin and loot Russia’s natural resources, would pose an immense danger of direct war.

On Wednesday, as Wong was in Ukraine, the UK Defence Secretary John Healey went a step further, suggesting a possible deployment of British military trainers as the war is still underway. Such trainers are no doubt on the ground already in a secret capacity. As historical experience, including the Vietnam War shows, the deployment of military trainers and advisors is frequently a prelude to a massive troop deployment.

Wong and her Labor government have clearly been involved in the backroom discussions surrounding these plans. Together with Defence Minister Richard Marles, she visited Britain before Ukraine. There they held talks about AUKUS, the militarist pact between the US, the UK and Australia, directed against China.

Marles declared he was confident that AUKUS, including the US provision of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia, would proceed under a Trump administration.

Significantly, asked about the possibility of Australian forces joining Macron’s hypothetical “peacekeeping” force, Marles did not rule it out. That is, he left open the possibility of Australian troops participating in what could only be a build-up for war with Moscow on Russia’s

borders.

The trip by Marles and Wong also includes meetings with NATO and European Union officials, which are no doubt along similar lines, related to the escalation in Ukraine.

A particular contribution of the Labor administration is to assist the imperialist powers in their increasingly direct linking of the proxy war with Russia and the confrontation with China.

Wong put forward that line while in Ukraine, declaring that “The closer ties between North Korea, China and Russia through the provision to Russia of North Korean missiles and ammunition, Chinese dual-use goods and even North Korean troops, does not bode well for security in our region.”

The comments dovetail with those of US national security leaders, who openly speak of a developing global war, pitting American imperialism and its allies against Russia, China and those countries with close relations to them.

The visit again demonstrates that the Labor government is not a minor player in this drive to a Third World War, but is actively involved in stoking it. Contrary to Wong, it is not China that is risking conflict in the Indo-Pacific.

Instead, the US is carrying out a vast military build-up, in explicit preparation for an aggressive war. That has included, over the past two years, the Labor government completing Australia’s transformation into a frontline state for such a conflict, including with AUKUS, the largest expansion of the Australian military since World War II and unprecedented US basing arrangements across the country.



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