

Australian political and media establishment intensifies anti-China campaign

By Oscar Grenfell
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Over the past week, the political and media establishment has intensified a protracted anti-China campaign aimed at whipping-up xenophobia and legitimising Australia's central role in US-led threats and military provocations against Beijing.

The major corporate newspapers have published a stream of articles warning of supposed Chinese government plots to interfere in the federal election, which must be held by May, and to gain a foothold in "sensitive" areas of the Australian technology sector. The commentary, which is entirely unsubstantiated, has the character of a coordinated political offensive.

Its purpose was demonstrated by bellicose anti-China comments delivered by Christopher Pyne, the Liberal-National Coalition government's defence minister, at the Fullerton Forum in Singapore on Monday. He signalled the government's willingness to participate in US-led "freedom of navigation" provocations in the South China Sea.

Pyne repeated the lying US justifications for naval incursions into waters near Chinese-claimed islets. He declared: "Australia is prepared to play its part in defending the rule of law. As such we are open to conducting multilateral activities in the South China Sea to demonstrate that they are international waters."

In reality, the US has deliberately inflamed longstanding territorial disputes in the region to ramp up pressure on the Chinese regime. This is part of a full-scale confrontation, including a vast US military build-up throughout the Indo-Pacific, trade war measures and military provocations.

Pyne's comments, which echo previous statements by senior Labor Party figures, are another demonstration that Australia is centrally involved in Washington's preparations for war against China. Until now, the Coalition government has declined US

requests to join "freedom of navigation operations," concerned by the potential impact on Australian capitalism's lucrative markets in China.

The Coalition and the Labor Party also have signalled full support for stepped-up US intrigues around the world. This week, both parties officially recognised Juan Guaidó, who is spearheading a US-backed coup attempt against Venezuela's democratically-elected government, as the country's president.

The media's anti-China campaign turns reality on its head, presenting China as an aggressor menacing Australia and countries throughout the region that the US has dominated since World War II. This propaganda has been conducted in close collaboration with the intelligence agencies in Australia and the US.

An article in the *Age* newspaper on Monday, for instance, warned that the Civil Aviation Safety Authority was installing drone detection technology at Sydney Harbour and Australian airports with Chinese-developed software that was previously banned in the US.

The article uncritically cited unsubstantiated US government agency statements in 2017, expressing "moderate confidence" that the technology had been used to provide "US critical infrastructure and law enforcement data to the Chinese government."

The *Age* briefly noted that Australian aviation authorities had said there was no way the technology could be used for espionage.

The article nevertheless featured warnings by Coalition MP Andrew Hastie, who chairs the joint intelligence committee, against "authoritarian foreign governments being involved in Australia's domestic and national security architecture." Hastie, who has close ties to Washington, said his position was in line with the stance of the US-led "Five Eyes" electronic

surveillance network.

Another article, published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, on Monday, warned that Australia is “helping” China “develop its rival system to the American GPS.” The article provided no evidence for its claims but instead made vague references to “a Perth tracking station.” It was based on comments by Anne-Marie Brady, a New Zealand academic who works for the US government-funded Wilson Center and whose anti-China statements have been featured prominently in the international press.

Other articles called for escalating censorship on the pretext of combating “Chinese interference” in Australian politics. A piece in the *Age* highlighted “warnings” by the International Cyber Policy Institute, which is part of the government-funded Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), that the Chinese-based WeChat social media platform could be used to spread “disinformation, censorship and propaganda” in the lead up to the federal election.

ASPI cyber security analyst Tom Uren declared: “In an ideal world the government would actually get transparency on how that platform runs in Australia.” His comment was a thinly-veiled call for stepped-up surveillance of WeChat’s 1.5 million Australian users, mostly of Chinese origin.

Rory Medcalf, head of the Australian National University’s National Security College, hailed the “foreign interference” laws, passed by the Coalition and Labor last June. The legislation, the most draconian since World War II, could criminalise anti-war organisations and internationally-coordinated political activity.

Medcalf indicated that even more repressive measures may be required. He stated: “Recent legislative changes will go a long way to reduce the risks of direct influence on our elections. The bigger risk is the use of propaganda, including online, to try to influence what voters think.”

Medcalf effectively suggested that political opinions that run counter to government and corporate propaganda were illegitimate. He stated: “There is a desire in Beijing to reduce Australia’s support for the US alliance and to neutralise Australia as a country that supports a rules-based order in Asia, on issues like the South China Sea or human rights.”

In other words, political parties, publications and

individuals that oppose the US-Australia alliance, and campaign against militarism and war, could be branded as purveyors of “Chinese influence.” The fact that domestic social and political opposition is one of the main targets of this campaign was underscored by another article, condemning “the progressive left” for failing to aggressively promote the anti-China hysteria.

Dr Mark Harrison, a lecturer in China studies at the University of Tasmania, complained: “The accusation of anti-China xenophobia has been readily used to close down debate about the nature of the PRC [People’s Republic of China] party state and its implications for Australia.”

The media barrage is a warning signal that the political establishment will use the federal election to escalate a pro-war propaganda campaign, aimed at justifying expanding militarism and intimidating social and political opposition in the working class.

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