

US agent 'set the agenda' for Morrison's Cabinet of One

The more details of former Prime Minister Scott Morrison's secret multi-ministerial power-grab are made public, the more questions arise as to who was actually pulling the strings. Though Morrison is undoubtedly every inch the unprincipled and power-hungry schemer he appears, files released (or just as importantly, kept secret) in the wake of recent Freedom of Information (FOI) requests suggest that the brain behind the operation to set Morrison up as dictator belongs to Andrew Shearer, Morrison's former Cabinet Secretary and now director-general of peak intelligence agency the Office of National Intelligence (ONI). A long-time Liberal Party apparatchik, Shearer is also a die-hard US loyalist whose career both in and out of government has largely been spent working with the Washington, DC foreign policy establishment to ensure Australia's continued support for the USA's doomed attempts to retain its geostrategic primacy in the Asia-Pacific, under the guise of defending against the threat of a hostile, "expansionist" China that does not in fact exist. And although the Labor Party strongly objected to Shearer's appointment as Director-General of Intelligence (DGI) in 2020, describing him as an unqualified "partisan operative" in whom it had no confidence, PM Anthony Albanese has reportedly "made a point" of retaining him, along with all the other Liberal-appointed intelligence chiefs, leaving Anglo-American plans to make Australia the base of operations for a war on China to proceed without disruption.

In mid-August, journalists from *The Australian* revealed that between March 2020 and April 2021, Morrison had secretly instructed Governor-General David Hurley to appoint him secret co-minister of Health; Finance; Industry, Science, Energy and Resources; Treasury; and Home Affairs. With the exception of then-Health Minister Greg Hunt, the first whose authority Morrison usurped, none of the relevant ministers were informed of the arrangement. Although Morrison's actions broke no law, the political class expressed shock that he would so brazenly undermine the conventions and traditions that underpin the pretence of democracy known as the Westminster parliamentary system; however as Guardian political correspondent Paul Karp noted 19 August, there had been various indications of Morrison lust for power and obsession with secrecy. One of these, discovered by Labor senators in a 2 March 2020 estimates hearing, was Morrison's establishment in 2019 of what he dubbed the Cabinet Office Policy Committee (COPC), "a body with just one permanent member: Scott Morrison", wrote Karp. "When meeting with ministers, public servants and stakeholders [i.e. business and other interest groups]—not all of whom were cabinet members—Morrison could nevertheless claim the meetings were Cabinet-in-confidence. Even if nothing discussed made it ... into the real cabinet."

Secrecy on steroids

In a 21 August follow-up, Karp reported that Morrison's secretive one-man "committee" had met hundreds of times during the last Parliament. "In response to Guardian Australia's FOI request for 'all minutes' of its meetings from 2 July 2019 to 11 April 2022 (excluding duplicates)", Karp wrote, "the department said the 'requested documents [comprise] 739 minutes of the former government's COPC'." This figure included the minutes of "subcommittees of the COPC, including the *National Cabinet*, which met 66 times in the last term, and women's safety taskforce, which [appears](#) to have met eight times. That leaves as many as 665 sets of minutes unaccounted for, implying hundreds of previously undisclosed meetings, even if some may have had multiple note-takers." (Emphasis added.)

One could hardly ask for better evidence of Morrison's inclination, if not aspiration, to dictatorial rule than the realisation that the so-called National Cabinet, formed to coordinate the entire national COVID-19 pandemic response and which subsequently superseded the former Council of Australian Governments (COAG) forum, was in his mind a mere *subcommittee* of a body which consisted solely of himself. That aside, such is Cabinet secrecy that those undisclosed meetings could have been with literally anyone, from the domestic staff at Kirribilli House to the second coming of Christ, and absent direct intervention by this or some future government the Australian public will be none the wiser for a minimum of 20 years. Speaking of which, despite then-Opposition Senate leader and now Foreign Minister Sen. Penny Wong having denounced the COPC in 2020 as an "abuse of process", and Albanese warning this August that it could have been the top of a "slippery slope" towards blanket secrecy, it is *Albanese's* PMC that refused the *Guardian's* FOI request; and the inquiry he commissioned into Morrison's abuse of power, by former High Court judge Virginia Bell, is focused only on the multiple ministries fiasco.



Will Glasgow
@wmdglasgow



Great pic by @ellinghausen on the plane with PM Albo as it flies to Tokyo for the Quad meeting.

There's Andrew Shearer on the far left. He's the head of Australia's peak intelligence assessment agency — and not what you'd call an “old friend of China”



ONI head Andrew Shearer flying with newly elected PM Anthony Albanese and Foreign Minister Penny Wong to the Quad meeting in Japan in May. The Labor Party harshly criticised Andrew Shearer's appointment as partisan, but Albanese has kept him on, in part because he's scared to shift Australia's foreign policy direction. Photo: Twitter

One person who surely knows exactly what went on, however, is Shearer. *The New Daily* reported 21 September that there are increasing calls in Canberra for senior bureaucrats and advisors to “face scrutiny about the role they played” in Morrison's string of power-grabs. After an initial focus on Morrison's PMC Secretary (and former Liberal Party advisor) Phil Gaetjens, wrote TND political editor James Robertson, “Now the role of the controversial head of Australia's intelligence services, and former Liberal adviser, Andrew Shearer, is coming under scrutiny ... [after he] was said to have been present at most of the Cabinet Office Policy Committee's first year of meetings while working as the former PM's advisor on cabinet matters”—that is, Cabinet Secretary—before he was promoted to DGI in October 2020. Robertson also reported that the COPC's “agenda was set by Mr Shearer” during this period.

Lunatics running the asylum

When former Labor Prime Minister Paul Keating famously declared at Labor's election campaign launch in May 2019 that “When the security agencies are running foreign policy, the nutters are in charge”, and urged then-Labor leader Bill Shorten to “clean them out” should he become PM after that month's election, Andrew Shearer (albeit he was not yet in office) is exactly the kind of character he was referring to. A former national security advisor to Liberal PMs John Howard (in office 1996-2007) and Tony Abbott (2013-15), Shearer has also been a strategic policy advisor to Liberal Defence Minister Robert Hill (2001-06) and advisor on international engagement to former Liberal Premier of Victoria Denis Naphthine, making Labor's description of him as a “partisan operative” apt so far as it goes.

More importantly, however, in between his public service (*sic*) roles, which also include stints at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Office of National Assessments (forerunner to the ONI) and a posting as political minister-counsellor at Australia's embassy in Washington, he has been a high-ranking member of the extended bipartisan foreign policy establishment, a.k.a. “the Blob”, whose function is to maintain continuity of foreign policy among all member and vassal states of the Anglo-American empire, regardless of which party is in government. He is a former director of studies at the Sydney-based Lowy Institute for International Policy, founded in 2003 by Westfield shopping empire magnate Frank Lowy. [Dr Kurt Campbell](#), architect of US President Barack Obama's 2011 “Asia Pivot” and now Indo-Pacific Coordinator on the Biden Administration's National Security Council (NSC), has lauded the Lowy Institute as one of the empire's most influential think tanks, declaring in a December 2021 interview that “No think tank ... has done more than the Lowy Institute in advancing how to think about Asia, how to think about the Indo-Pacific, how to think about Australia's role in the world.”¹

According to a thumbnail [biography](#) on Lowy's website, in May 2016 Shearer joined the Washington, DC-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) as senior advisor on Asia-Pacific Security and director of its “Alliances and American Leadership Project”, where he remained until

shortly before his return to the PMC. His output at CSIS is typified by a May 2018 article co-authored with former George W. Bush Administration NSC “Asia guru” Dr Michael Green,² then CSIS’s Senior Vice President for Asia and director of Asia studies at DC’s Georgetown University. As of May this year Green is CEO of the University of Sydney’s United States Studies Centre, and reportedly remains influential with Shearer, who regards him as a mentor.

Titled “Countering China’s militarisation of the Indo-Pacific”, Green and Shearer’s article consists mainly of recycled scare stories about China’s alleged ambitions to take the USA’s place as the region’s predominant military power, such as the then-recent (but already debunked) story originated by the US Navy, via *Sydney Morning Herald*, that China sought to build a naval base in Vanuatu (it was actually a cruise ship terminal and hotel/casino complex); establish equally imaginary army bases in Pakistan; and using the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to entice developing countries via “debt-trap diplomacy” into economically unviable infrastructure projects, which it would then take over and convert into “a string of bases and dual-use ports from Hainan to Djibouti” in East Africa—a proposition so fanciful that even London’s premier geopolitical think tank the Royal Institute for International Affairs (Chatham House) has since labelled it a “myth”.³

After going on to rehash Australia’s colonial-era fear of abandonment to the mercies of Asia (a.k.a. the “Yellow Peril”), its actual abandonment by the British to Imperial Japan in World War II, and a romanticised Yanks-to-the-rescue potted history of the war’s latter years, the pair helpfully suggest that to prevent history repeating itself Australia should work with its Quadrilateral Security Dialogue partners the USA, India and (irony of ironies) Japan to “step up ... [their] maritime presence and military capability-building in the Indian Ocean. Two cost-effective ways to do this would be to increase interoperability through an expanded Malabar exercise series and to establish a rotational presence of US surface combatant vessels at HMAS Stirling in Western Australia (and *consider the possibility of investing in the nuclear support infrastructure necessary for basing of attack submarines as well*).” (Emphasis added.) It strains credulity to imagine it a coincidence that a year later Shearer was back in the PMC helping to organise exactly that, a role which expanded further upon his promotion to head of the ONI. In this capacity it is widely reported (though never officially admitted) that he was Canberra’s principal liaison with the Biden Administration, via Campbell, to arrange the trilateral AUKUS (Australia-UK-US) security pact, under which Australia is eventually to acquire (probably US-made) nuclear submarines; along with other agreements which in the meantime will allow the US military to station unlimited numbers of men and types of weapons (with the ostensible exception of nuclear missiles) on Australian soil.

Demonstrating the Labor Party’s own loyalty to the US “alliance”, it now has nothing but praise for the man it derided in 2020 as a partisan hack unqualified to give the frank and fearless advice any senior public servant, let alone a Director-General of Intelligence, is supposed to render to his or her Minister. Simon Benson and Geoff Chambers, the *Australian* journalists who first revealed Morrison’s covert control of the nation’s five most powerful ministries, reported 24 September that Albanese has established a “good working relationship” with Shearer, who “is regarded as a key pillar of continuity along with Mike Pezzullo, the secretary of Home Affairs ... and Defence secretary Greg Moriarty.” Indeed, they continued, “Albanese has made a point of leaving the national security architecture completely untouched.” According to an unnamed “highly placed government insider”, he has done so mainly for political reasons: “He knows what would happen if you opened up a flank on security”, the source reportedly said. “So why have that fight? Why would you bother?”

Which is to say, at best Albanese is the latest in a long line, stretching back almost 20 years, of cowardly Labor leaders who would rather see their country descend into Hell at the behest of foreign agents pushing US geopolitical agendas, than risk being politically “wedged” on issues of national security.

Footnotes:

1. “[The Lowy Institute Part One: Australia’s foreign influence operation](#)”, AAS, 31 Aug. 2022.

2. “[Bush Administration’s ‘Asia guru’ admits Australia can scuttle US plans for war with China](#)”, AAS, 21 Sept. 2022.

3. L. Jones and S. Hameiri, “[Debunking the myth of ‘debt-trap diplomacy’](#)”, 19 Aug. 2020

By Richard Bardon, Australian Alert Service, 30 September 2022