

US-Australian military exercise rehearses for war against China

By James Cogan
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The Labor government's commitment to the Obama administration's "pivot" to Asia and preparations for a military confrontation with China has been on display since July 15 in the form of a major exercise named "Talisman Saber." As many as 22,000 American personnel and 16 ships, alongside up to 10,000 Australian personnel and 11 ships, are currently rehearsing in northern Australia and the Coral Sea for the outbreak of a war.

Talisman Saber exercises have been staged every two years since 2005. They are viewed in the Pentagon and its Pacific Command (PACOM) as one of the most important exercises held in the Asian region. PACOM refers to them as the "primary training venue for Commander Seventh Fleet as a Combined Task Force (CTF) in a short warning, power projection, forcible entry scenario" and "a key opportunity to train Australian and US combined forces in mid to high-intensity combat operations."

This year's exercise involves the majority of the US Seventh Fleet, including its command and control vessel, the Blue Ridge, the massive amphibious assault ship Bonhomme Richard, which can deploy close to 2,000 marines, and the aircraft carrier George Washington. The Australian Navy frigate Sydney, which was "embedded" with the Seventh Fleet earlier in the year, is operating as part of the George Washington's escort, as well as another frigate, the Perth. Australian submarines and support ships are also rehearsing how to integrate rapidly into the far larger US fleet.

Before the exercise ends on August 5, the US and Australian forces will have completed several war games based on the scenario that the fictional nation "Kamaria" is threatening the key sea lanes between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Such war games are always

presented as defensive actions, responding to external threats. In reality, a central aspect of the US military's "AirSea Battle" doctrine is the offensive deployment of American and allied forces to blockade sea lanes, such as the Straits of Malacca, the Sunda Straits and Lombok Straits, and cut off China's access to oil, gas and other raw materials from the Middle East and Africa.

Talisman Saber is largely a practice run for imposing a blockade. Since July 25, the combined US and Australian naval fleet has been conducting offensive operations against the "Kamarians" in the Coral Sea, with an emphasis on anti-submarine and anti-air exercises. Last weekend, the Shoalwater Bay Training Area in Queensland was used to practice an amphibious assault by a newly trained Australian marine unit, combined with US marines using Osprey vertical landing aircraft to secure strategic territory. Four hundred US paratroopers based in Alaska were flown non-stop for 17 hours and dropped into Shoalwater Bay as the beach landing took place, in a demonstration of how American forces could be rapidly deployed.

The mainstream media has barely referred to the offensive character of Talisman Saber. Most coverage was given to an incident on July 16. American jet fighters, reportedly low on fuel, jettisoned two bombs containing 250 kilograms of explosives, albeit without fuses, within the World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef marine park. Fearing any negative publicity that could trigger broader questions regarding its activities in Australia, the Pentagon quickly went into damage control. The US Navy launched a mission to locate and retrieve the bombs.

The US military journal *Stars and Stripes* noted that the exercise is linked to war preparations. It

commented on July 25 on the “increasingly tense regional environment” in which the exercise is being held. US Navy vice admiral Scott Swift, the commander of the Seventh Fleet, told the journal: “Concerns in the region are certainly increased over what they were two years ago when I first took over.”

Stars and Stripes drew attention to the establishment in 2011 of a US marine base in Darwin and the subsequent embedding of Australian ships with the Seventh Fleet. The journal commented: “The threat of North Korea’s nuclear program, China’s tense dealing with US allies in the region and America’s increasingly important economic ties have led to the administration’s emphasis on a strategy known in government circles as the ‘rebalance’ toward Asia.”

The growth of tensions in the Asia-Pacific over the past two years is not a mystery. It is the direct outcome of the US military build-up in the region and its provocative encouragement of Japan and the Philippines to engage in tense stand-offs with China over disputed island territories. The US has exploited the flashpoints to step-up planning for the outbreak of conflict and an all-out attack on China.

Talisman Saber is a further demonstration that the Obama administration’s plans for war with China involve Australia as a critical base of operations, with the Australian military as an adjunct to US forces. The Labor government, fully backed by the main opposition parties and the Greens, has given its unconditional agreement and cooperation.

As the exercise began, revelations surfaced that the Pine Gap satellite base in central Australia is pivotal to the day-to-day operations of the US military and intelligence agencies, including their drone attacks in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Yemen and spying on foreign governments.

Other Australian facilities are involved in the surveillance, via the Internet and telephone communications, of hundreds of millions of people around the world. Australian airbases and ports are also available to the US armed forces at their demand. Australian military units, from the special forces operating in Afghanistan to the ships embedded in US fleets in the Persian Gulf and the Pacific, are viewed, and view themselves, as part of the global personnel available to Pentagon.

The Labor government’s growing incorporation of

Australia into the American military machine has taken place entirely behind the backs, and without the agreement, of the working class. The political establishment and the media collaborate to conceal from workers and youth the reality that the ruling classes in both the US and Australia are actively contemplating a war that could trigger a nuclear conflagration and a historical catastrophe.

The danger of war must be answered by the struggle for a socialist and internationalist perspective by the working class, and the establishment of a workers’ government, based on socialist policies, that repudiates the US alliance, closes down the US military bases and dismantles the military apparatus of the Australian state.

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