

Australia's integration into US war plans against China

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The deep integration of Australia into the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia" demonstrates the very advanced character of the US preparations throughout the Indo-Pacific for war with China. Australia, along with Japan, is rapidly being transformed into a giant base for future US operations in the region.

At last month's AUSMIN (Australia-US Ministerial) talks, Australia's foreign and defence ministers committed to "increased rotations of US Air Force aircraft in northern Australia," as well as further "naval cooperation in Australia" and more "combined exercises in Australia and multilateral engagement in the broader region." Negotiations will begin on a "binding agreement" to support US rotational deployments.

The AUSMIN communiqué represents a dramatic acceleration of Australia's involvement in the Pentagon's war plans. So-called rotational deployments, in effect basing arrangements for US forces, are well underway. By 2017, the US Marine presence in the northern city of Darwin will reach 2,500—a complete Marine Air Ground Task Force with associated aircraft and military equipment. Nuclear-capable B-52 bombers are already conducting fully-fledged operations, not training runs, into Australian airbases near Darwin.

While the language of the AUSMIN communiqué is deliberately muted, a series of US think tank reports have highlighted the central importance of Australia in US war preparations against China. The Centre for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment (CBSA) released a report last month entitled, "Gateway to the Indo-Pacific: Australian Defense Strategy and the Future of the Australian-US Alliance," which explained that "Australia had moved from 'down under' to 'top centre' in terms of geopolitical import" for American strategy.

The CBSA, which has close ties with the Pentagon, outlined in considerable detail the role that the Australian military and its bases would play in a US war with China. The island continent would be transformed into a vast base to sustain a US blockade of China by controlling key shipping lanes through South East Asia and conducting attacks on Chinese vessels in the Indian Ocean. It would also function as a protected rear area for the US military as it launched its AirSea Battle plan to devastate the Chinese mainland. The report detailed what was needed to upgrade northern Australian air bases and the Stirling naval base in Western Australia, as well as the purchases required for the Australian military.

The AUSMIN communiqué laid out other areas of military cooperation, including the construction of two "space security" facilities in Western Australia and the expansion of cyber warfare capacities. As revealed by US National Security Agency (NSA) documents leaked by Edward Snowden, Australia is already centrally involved in the NSA's massive spying operations in Asia—an essential component of war. As well as intelligence gathered by key surveillance bases such as Pine Gap, Australian agencies feed the NSA with vast amounts of data by tapping into undersea cables and operating listening posts in Australian diplomatic missions across the region.

Such is the close integration of the Australian military with US forces that if Washington were to declare war on China, Australia would automatically be involved. Washington cannot afford to have a government in Canberra that would hesitate in also declaring war.

Another US think tank, the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), devoted an entire report, published in October, to the issue of "building a politically sustainable US military presence in South

East Asia and Australia.” It criticised the lack of attention to “the fundamentally important task of ensuring enduring political support, without which US force posture objectives in the region cannot be achieved.”

Acutely aware of widespread public hostility in the region to US bases, the CNAS report outlined a strategy that “aims to develop an affirmative rationale for enhanced US military presence while proposing policies to insulate this presence from potential political challenges.”

The Obama administration has already gone well beyond the CNAS’s rather modest proposals, designed to disguise the US military build-up in Asia and neutralise political opposition. Over the past four years, it has mounted what former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton termed in November 2010 “forward-deployed diplomacy” that involved sending “our assets... into every corner and every capital of the Asia Pacific region.”

The two linchpins of the Obama administration’s “pivot”—Australia and Japan—were the focus of special attention. In June 2010, both Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama and, just weeks later, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, were levered out of office with Washington’s backing. Hatoyama and Rudd committed the same “crime” in Obama’s eyes. While committed to the respective US alliances, they proposed initiatives to ease tensions between the US and China, right at the point when Obama was ratchetting up the pressure on Beijing.

In Australia’s case, key Labor and trade union powerbrokers, later revealed in WikiLeaks cables as “protected sources” of the US embassy, orchestrated an inner-party political coup that overnight replaced Rudd with Julia Gillard, who immediately pledged fealty to Washington. The central importance of Australia was underscored by Obama’s decision to formally announce the “pivot” in November 2011, not in Washington, but in the Australian parliament—courtesy of Gillard.

Now, barely three months in office, the Liberal-National Coalition government, like its Labor predecessor, has quickly demonstrated its unalloyed support for Washington’s aggressive strategy toward China. When China announced an air defence identification zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea last

month, Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop immediately joined Washington and Tokyo in condemning the move. Australia could have avoided taking sides, like New Zealand, but instead Bishop called in the Chinese ambassador for a dressing down.

The sudden flare-up of tensions in the East China Sea highlights the very real danger facing the working class throughout Asia and internationally of a slide to war. Yet workers and youth are being deliberately kept in the dark over the Australian government’s commitment to the advanced US preparations for war against China. Throughout this year’s lengthy Australian election campaign, the media and political establishment blacked out any mention, let alone debate, of the discussion occurring in strategic circles in Washington and Canberra.

The deepening global economic crisis is fuelling geo-political tensions that bear a chilling resemblance to those a century ago. The drive by US imperialism to use its military might to maintain its economic and strategic dominance in Asia and the world is threatening to precipitate a conflict that would completely eclipse the catastrophe of World War I. The only means of halting this war drive is through a united struggle of workers—in Australia, China, the US and throughout Asia and the world—to put an end to global capitalism and its outmoded nation-state system on the basis of a socialist and internationalist perspective.

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