

# Australian Greens cover up Defence White Paper plans for war on China

By Mike Head  
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In response to last week's Australian Defence White Paper, the Greens have remained completely silent on the core content of the document—advanced preparations for participating in a US-led war against China. By their reaction, the Greens, who once postured as an anti-war party, have sent another signal of their readiness to support such a war, a potentially catastrophic conflagration in which millions of people would be killed.

The White Paper identifies China's economic expansion and emerging military strength as the primary threat to US supremacy in Asia and globally and therefore to Australian "national interests," which are identified as being tied to those of Washington. The document declares full support for the US "pivot" or "rebalance" to Asia, which involves the deployment of 60 percent of the US Navy and Air Force within Asia in order to confront China. It sets out the spending of hundreds of billions of dollars on boosting the military for that purpose, acquiring key weapons systems required for further integration into the Pentagon's battle plans—notably submarines, warships, fighter jets, drones and cyber warfare capacities.

There was not one word about these plans in the brief media statements made by the Greens last week on the White Paper. Nothing was said about the "pivot," the US alliance or the expansion of US military use of northern and western Australian ports and airfields, and the Cocos Islands in the Indian Ocean.

Instead, the Greens criticised the Liberal-National government for abandoning, via defence spending, its pledges to the finance markets to eliminate the budget deficit by the early 2020s. Greens defence and finance spokesman Senator Peter Whish-Wilson, a business owner and ex-banker, said the government was engaged in a "cash splash" that has "obliterated future

budget surpluses." His February 26 media release commented: "The government is completely lost at sea with their fiscal strategy."

Whish-Wilson accused the government of "pork-barrelling defence industries," as if the huge increases in spending were simply a matter of winning votes in key electorates. This serves to divert attention from the militarist agenda driving the greatest expansion of the armed forces since World War II.

In a statement on February 25, Whish-Wilson explicitly declared that the Greens are not opposed to increased military spending, provided it is devoted to "protecting Australia"—that is, the geo-strategic interests of Australian capitalism. "The Greens believe it is not the job of Australian taxpayers to spend up on military hardware to intercede in a proxy war between our two largest trading partners over 4,000 kilometres from our shores. We need a defence force that protects Australia, not one that exists to play gate-keeper between two regional powers."

The reference to "our two largest trading partners" suggests a confrontation between China, Australia's biggest trading partner, and Japan, the second largest. The reality that the Greens seek to obscure is that the primary battle lines throughout the Indo-Pacific region are being drawn by the US against China. Washington is conducting a massive military buildup and forging a series of base-sharing and other alliances, most notably with Australia, Japan and the Philippines, but also South Korea and a host of other governments.

Greens leader Senator Richard Di Natale has said virtually nothing on the White Paper. He told reporters it was the sort of "blueprint you would expect from Tony Abbott." In fact, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull ensured that the White Paper left no doubt that the government's commitment to the US "pivot"

remained just as complete as it had been under his predecessor, Abbott, and brought forward by two years the deadline to increase defence spending to at least 2 percent of gross domestic product.

All these basic commitments were first made, not by Abbott, but by Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard, who was installed as prime minister via a Washington-backed inner-party coup in mid-2010. After Gillard led Labor to near-defeat at an election three months later, the Greens supplied the parliamentary numbers to keep her minority government in office as it signed up to the “pivot” in November 2011.

In 2003, the Greens opposed Australia’s involvement in the Bush administration’s invasion of Iraq. But they did so in order to derail the mass opposition that erupted to that war. Promoted by pseudo-left groups in “stop the war” coalitions, the Greens peddled illusions that they represented an anti-war voice in parliament, that pressure could be applied via the UN to halt the invasion.

The Greens’ “opposition” to Australia’s participation in that war was purely tactical—that military forces should be used to defend Australian imperialism’s predatory interests in the Asia Pacific region. That was why the Greens endorsed the Obama administration’s shift in focus to the “pivot to Asia.” Former Greens leader Bob Brown, who heckled President Bush in the Australian parliament in 2003 about the Iraq war, welcomed Obama in 2011 when the US president used the parliament, courtesy of the Labor government, to formally announce the “pivot.”

While the Greens remain deliberately silent about the real content of the White Paper, they are certainly conscious of the plans being prepared for war against China. Last July, in off-the-cuff remarks at a pacifist conference, Senator Scott Ludlam, who was then acting party leader, described the large joint US-Australian “Talisman Sabre” military exercise taking place across northern Australia as training for “expeditionary wars and invasions.” He stated: “I don’t think we should be preparing for a war with China ... I don’t think we should be participating in that kind of provocation.”

Ludlam’s remarks went largely unreported by the corporate media and he never repeated them. His comments reflected the fears of elements of the Australian establishment that supporting the US war

drive will end in disaster and undermine Australian capitalism’s substantial economic ties with China.

The dominant factions of the Australian ruling class, however, calculate that Australian imperialist interests—hegemony in the South Pacific, major investments in Wall Street and the prospect of greater market share in Asia in particular—are best served by ensuring the US retains its dominant position.

The silence of the Greens, along with the rest of the political establishment, on the militarist agenda contained in the White Paper reflects above all the fear that the lurch to war and massive military spending will provoke determined opposition and resistance among workers and youth.

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