

# CSIS report argues for strong US-Japan-Australia alliance against China

By Peter Symonds  
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As the US ramps up its military provocations in the South China Sea against China, the Washington-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) issued a major report this month entitled “Australia-Japan-US Maritime Cooperation.” It calls for greater military integration between the United States and its two chief allies in Asia.

The report argues for a “federated defence” in response to “the evolving threat environment in Asia and the Pacific, including increasing Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea and East China Sea.” In reality, “federated defence” is nothing but a system of military alliances in preparation for war with China—akin to the alliances that preceded the previous two world wars.

The report contains specific recommendations to enhance “inter-operability” on intelligence and surveillance, submarine and anti-submarine warfare, amphibious forces and logistics. It also outlines the extent to which the three imperialist powers already act together. The United States has longstanding alliances with Japan and Australia, which, with Washington’s encouragement, have developed closer military ties between themselves over the past decade.

The report’s author, Andrew Shearer, is a senior figure in the Australian foreign policy and military establishment, having served as national security adviser to two prime ministers, John Howard and Tony Abbott. Shearer is also very well connected in Washington. There, as the CSIS notes, he has been a senior diplomat who “worked at the coal-face of the Australia-US alliance to strengthen defence, security, and intelligence cooperation.” His presence at the CSIS, a think tank centrally involved in the US military build-up against China, is another indication of the close collaboration between Washington and Canberra.

The CSIS report dispenses with the usual attempts to dress up military collaboration as necessary to respond to natural disasters, piracy, terrorism and so on. It bluntly declares that while “these low intensity missions are necessary, they are no longer sufficient. Federated defence is more ambitious, recognising a new approach is also needed to the more traditional and fundamental ‘hard security’ objectives of deterring potential aggression and reassuring regional allies and partners.”

Shearer makes clear, in his detailed comparison of China’s military capabilities with those of the United States, Australia and Japan, that the main “hard security” objective is to prepare for war with China. He highlights “the most immediate concern of US defence planners” as being China’s development of so-called A2/AD weapons—Anti-Access, Area Denial—aimed at countering the US military in waters off the Chinese mainland in the event of conflict.

The Pentagon’s preoccupation with “freedom of navigation” and China’s A2/AD systems flows directly from its military strategy for war with China—Air Sea Battle. This is premised on being able to launch massive missile and air attacks on the Chinese mainland from warships and submarines in nearby waters, as well as from military bases in Japan and South Korea. Australia and Japan are central to Air Sea Battle and associated strategies, which include a naval blockade of China to strangle its economy.

“In the event of a conflict with China, the United States and its allies could adopt a range of strategies to counter its A2/AD capabilities,” the report explains. All are based on Air Sea Battle, which “relies on networked, integrated forces to take the offensive across air, maritime, land, space and cyberspace to disrupt, destroy and defeat an adversary’s A2/AD

capabilities, allowing friendly forces maximum flexibility to defeat opposing forces.”

Japan would be central to such a blitzkrieg and “would also play an important role in executing less direct strategies based on maritime denial.” Such a naval blockade would destroy Chinese naval and commercial shipping within the first island chain [waters near China] to cripple China’s economy and hem its military forces into the near sea.”

The report identifies Australia’s role as akin that played during World War II—“as a vital logistics base and stronghold athwart key lines of communication between the Pacific and Indian Oceans.” It notes that Australia already has been engaged in discussions about Air Sea Battle with US defence officials “and could be expected to contribute a range of niche contributions in support of any such efforts... Australia’s submarines, in particular, could be called upon to operate around archipelagic chokepoints between South East Asia and the Indian Ocean in any maritime denial scenario.”

As a result, the report places a premium on developing military ties between Australia and Japan—described as the “northern and southern ‘anchors’ of the US alliance system in the Pacific.” These moves have accelerated since the signing of a joint declaration on security cooperation in 2007, and especially following the election of Japan’s right-wing Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. His government last year rammed through unconstitutional legislation enabling “collective self-defence.” The new law gives the green light for the Japanese military to directly participate in US-led wars of aggression, to forge quasi-alliances with other countries, such as Australia, and to sell arms abroad.

The Australian government is in the process of tendering for a new fleet of submarines that will cost at least \$50 billion to build and another \$100 billion to maintain. Acting as a mouthpiece for the Pentagon, Shearer co-authored an *Australian* article this month with CSIS senior vice-president for Asia, Michael Green, strongly arguing that the Japanese bid should be chosen over its German and French rivals on strategic grounds.

“Australia, the US and regional stability will benefit from a highly capable and interoperable Australian submarine force and from a more engaged Japan. From

a strategic viewpoint, it’s hard to argue that Japan isn’t the best international submarine partner for Australia,” the article declared.

The CSIS report also calls for other allies and strategic partners, especially India, to be integrated into the framework of a trilateral US-Japan-Australia “federated defence” system.

A quadrilateral defence initiative or “quad” involving India was first mooted in 2007 by Abe, during his first term in office, but it was sunk by Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in 2008. Australia’s unilateral withdrawal alienated the US and contributed to Rudd’s ouster in 2010 by Labor Party powerbrokers linked to Washington. While suggesting that a quadrilateral alliance should remain a long-term objective, the CSIS report concludes that “there is no time to lose,” so the main focus should be on strengthening naval ties between the US, Japan and Australia.

The sense of urgency that runs through the document, as well as its open discussion of scenarios for war with China—that is, one involving nuclear-armed powers—is a sharp warning that Washington is not preparing for conflict in the distant future. Indeed, one of the report’s reasons for closer trilateral collaboration is that US predominance is waning—“the US military is steadily losing the technological edge it has enjoyed for more than half a century.” This is an argument for waging war sooner, rather than later.

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