

# Australia lines up with US for war with China

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An Australian defence posture report, released last week, is the latest sign of the Obama administration's reckless and aggressive push against China on all fronts—diplomatic, economic and military.

The interim review spells out the wide scope of the military agreement announced last November by Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard and President Barack Obama. While the stationing of up to 2,500 Marines near the northern city of Darwin dominated the headlines, the deal provided for extensive access for American warships and warplanes to Australian naval and air bases.

The report advocates a major upgrading of military facilities in Australia's north and west that would facilitate expanded American naval and air operations in the Indian Ocean and along the vital shipping routes through South East Asia. By dominating key "choke points" such as the Strait of Malacca, the US has the potential to cut off China's access to energy and raw materials from Africa and the Middle East in the event of any war.

The Australian media coverage of the defence review could have been drawn from the theatre of the absurd. While the military build-up clearly dovetails with US moves against China, the headlines blared "Move to guard northern wealth" and "Our vulnerable north." No one answered the obvious question: defend from whom? Given the US-Australian military alliance, no neighbouring country, including China, has the capability to seize Australia's northern gas fields or invade the country's "thinly populated north."

The opening up of northern Australia to US military forces strikes an aggressive, not a defensive, posture that puts the country on the frontline of any US war

with China. The media coverage only serves to chloroform working people as to the immense dangers posed by the Labor government's unconditional support for American militarism. The entire political establishment, from the conservative Liberal-National opposition through the Greens and pseudo-radical groups, is silent on these criminal moves.

The rush to publish an interim report setting out the new Australian military posture was designed to preempt any opposition in ruling circles at home amid escalating geo-political tensions. Preparations by the US and its European allies for a political/military intervention in Syria, as well as heightened threats of military action against Iran, cut directly across the economic and strategic interests of China and Russia in particular.

The Obama administration is also stepping up the pressure on China throughout Asia. Washington's "pivot" toward the Indo-Pacific over the past three years has involved an aggressive diplomatic intervention into territorial disputes in the South China Sea; the tightening of alliances with South Korea and Japan, which have adopted a more confrontational stance toward China and China's ally North Korea; the strengthening of ties with China's major regional rival India; and the unveiling of a major trade initiative—the Trans Pacific Partnership—aimed at laying down US terms for regional trade at China's expense.

In South East Asia, the Obama administration has encouraged the Philippines and Vietnam to more forcefully pursue their maritime disputes with China in the South China Sea that have already produced several clashes. The Philippines is in talks with Washington over a new defence agreement along the lines of the Australian pact. It would lead to a greater US military

presence directly adjacent to these sensitive, strategic waters and to southern China itself. At the same time, the Pentagon has been establishing closer ties with Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam.

Simultaneously, the Obama administration has worked assiduously to bring about a shift in Burma—formerly China’s closest partner in South East Asia and a potential energy and transport corridor from the Indian Ocean to southern China. Following US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s visit in December, the US announced an exchange of ambassadors and partially lifted sanctions. Significantly, as reported this week in the *New York Times*, CIA director David Petraeus plans to visit Burma to forge closer intelligence ties with the military junta.

The authors of the Australian defence posture review are well aware of the US strategy. The document cautiously outlines the “key strategic judgments” on which it was based, including China’s expanding “power projection and sea control capabilities”; “securing sea lines of communication and energy supplies will be a strategic driver”; “the South China Sea remains a potential flashpoint”; and “South East Asia is becoming more important to the wider Asia-Pacific strategic balance.”

The Obama administration’s provocative drive against China has compounded the basic dilemma confronting Australian capitalism: how to balance support for its longstanding strategic ally, the United States, against its heavy dependence on China for mining exports. That Washington will brook no equivocation was demonstrated by its undoubted involvement in the ousting of Kevin Rudd as Australian prime minister in mid-2010. Rudd’s offence in US eyes was seeking to moderate tensions between the US and China while Obama was intent on boosting pressure on Beijing and demanded firm allies, not diplomatic mediators.

Throughout the region, a similar conundrum confronts governments, that rely on China economically but are fearful of being on the wrong side of the world’s predominant military power. The rising geo-political tensions have been worsened by the

deepening global economic crisis. To stem its relative economic decline, US imperialism is resorting to increasingly reckless military adventures to undermine the growth of potential rivals, above all China.

Fierce rivalry on the international stage is accompanied by a vicious assault on the democratic rights and social position of the working class in every country. As tensions erupt to the surface, the whipping up of chauvinism and jingoism will undoubtedly intensify as the ruling elites seek to block the resistance of workers to their austerity agenda. In Australia, the filthy traditions of anti-Asian paranoia that have formed the stock-in-trade of the political establishment, especially the Labor Party, are already being revived.

The only social force that can halt the drive to war is the international working class. The allies of workers in Australia and America are to be found in the Chinese and Asian working class. The closest unity must be forged through a rejection of all forms of nationalism and the development of a common struggle for a socialist alternative to the capitalist system, which is the fundamental source of social inequality and war.

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