

What commitments has the Labor government made to US war plans?

Peter Symonds—SEP Senate candidate for Western Australia
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In launching its 2013 election campaign in May, the Socialist Equality Party insisted that workers and youth had to demand answers to vital questions concerning the government's commitments to the US war preparations against China. What is the real purpose of US bases across the country? What new bases and military deployments are planned? How advanced are American military plans?

Since then, the revelations of National Security Agency (NSA) whistleblower Edward Snowden and other leaked information have confirmed that Australian bases are not only vital to the build-up of American military forces in the Indo-Pacific, but are already centrally involved in the vast American electronic spying, communication and control apparatus that supports its criminal wars and operations around the world.

Last weekend, the Fairfax media revealed that the joint US-Australian Pine Gap spy base was an essential link in the Obama administration's drone wars in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen that have killed thousands of people, many of them civilians. President Obama is personally involved in selecting the targets for assassination, including American citizens, in blatant contravention of the US constitution and international law. US and Australian personnel at Pine Gap sift the huge amounts of telecommunications data intercepted throughout the region, from the Middle East to East Asia, to provide the coordinates for drone strikes.

The Labor government is directly involved in this criminal activity. The claim by Defence Minister Stephen Smith in parliament last month that Australia did not approve "every activity or tasking undertaken" is simply not credible. The Fairfax article reported the Pine Gap base has undergone "a massive quantitative

and qualitative transformation" over the past decade, and "especially the past three years"—that is, as President Obama has ramped up the drone killings.

Pine Gap's involvement in Obama's drone wars is just one aspect of its integral role in US military and intelligence operations. What other US crimes is it involved in? In 2010 and 2011, Israel, with the complicity of the US, carried out the murder of at least five Iranian nuclear scientists. Was Pine Gap involved in providing telecommunications data on the intended targets to Mossad via American intelligence? Is it supplying intelligence to the reactionary US-backed militias seeking to overthrow the Assad regime in Syria?

Pine Gap is one of four Australian bases identified by Edward Snowden as part of the vast American electronic spying network across the globe. The others are Shoal Bay Receiving Station near Darwin, the Australian Defence Satellite Communications Station at Geraldton in Western Australia, and the naval communications station HMAS Harman outside Canberra, where a new, state-of-the art data storage facility is being constructed. These bases contribute data to the NSA's X-Keyscore program that collects phone numbers, email addresses, log-ins and user activity around the world in massive data banks.

As the Internet has eclipsed other forms of electronic communications over the past decade, Australia has become centrally involved in plugging American intelligence agencies into the fibre optic backbone via trans-continental cables. The *Washington Post* revealed that the Australian telecommunications giant Telstra, along with other cable operators, has signed agreements to establish "a facility" staffed by US citizens with top security clearances at landing stations in the US for its cables from Australia, Asia and Europe. In effect,

Telstra has given US intelligence agencies a free hand to scoop up massive quantities of telecommunications data for storage and later processing.

These revelations provide just a glimpse of the way in which the Australian military, intelligence agencies and corporations are deeply enmeshed in the American intelligence and war apparatus.

The Obama administration's "pivot to Asia" has involved preparations for a military assault on China. The build-up of American military hardware and personnel throughout Asia—including US Marines in Darwin, plans for drones on the Cocos Islands, and warships at the Stirling naval base near Perth—has gone hand-in-hand with Australian integration into US electronic spying and cyber warfare preparations. Snowden has revealed that the NSA has already hacked into hundreds of Chinese government, military and commercial computers including vital Internet nodes.

The centrality of Australian bases to the US military was underscored by an unnamed Australian intelligence official who told the Fairfax media: "The US will never fight another war in the eastern hemisphere without the direct involvement of Pine Gap." In other words, the Australian people are automatically on the frontline of any US war in Asia, without their knowledge, let alone consent.

None of this can be publicly discussed or debated. With few exceptions, the Australian political establishment and media has responded to Snowden's exposures with silence. Labor government ministers have refused to comment on the stream of leaks on "national security" grounds. After a decade of Australian involvement in US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the ruling class fears an outpouring of opposition if the real extent of Australian involvement in US war plans was known.

The preparations for war cannot be carried out democratically. The massive NSA police state apparatus exposed by Snowden is directed just as much against the American people as it is against China and other rivals of US imperialism. It is inconceivable that Australian intelligence agencies are not using their access to the huge US data banks under the "Five Eyes" intelligence alliance to spy on the Australian population.

The US drive towards war against China is being fuelled by the worsening global crisis of capitalism.

American imperialism is determined to use its military might to retain its global dominance against any potential rival. That is the source of the sharply rising tensions, the escalating arms race and flaring of flash points throughout the Asian region as the US seeks to encircle China with a web of military alliances and bases.

The only way of halting the drive to war is through the building a broad, international movement of the working class directed at abolishing the root cause of militarism and war—the profit system itself. The full truth of the Labor government's involvement in the US war plans will only emerge in the course of the fight for a workers' government committed to socialist policies, including the dismantling of US military bases and the entire military-intelligence apparatus of the Australian state.

The struggle against war is intimately bound up with the fight for democratic rights. The SEP calls on workers and youth to defend Edward Snowden, who has courageously exposed the illegal activities of US imperialism. His defence must become part of the broader fight against the drift towards police state measures around the world.

Above all we appeal to you to participate in our 2013 election campaign and to join the SEP—the only party that is fighting for a socialist perspective against war, austerity and the drive to dictatorship.

Authorised by Nick Beams, 113/55 Flemington Rd, North Melbourne VIC 3051



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