

Report urges closer US-Australian military collaboration against China

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A major think tank report launched yesterday in Sydney advocates the further consolidation of US-Australian military cooperation to maintain American dominance of the Asia Pacific and to counter the growing economic and strategic influence of China within the region.

The report entitled “The ANZUS Alliance in an Ascending Asia” was jointly produced by the Australian National University’s Strategic and Defence Studies Centre and the Washington-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). The CSIS has played a key role in helping to elaborate the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia” against China. ANZUS is the post-World War II security treaty between the US, Australia and New Zealand.

In line with Washington’s propaganda, the report paints Beijing as an aggressive, expansionist power that poses a threat to the peace and stability of the region. It highlights “growing Chinese influence and assertiveness,” points to China’s military expenditure and claims that “China’s growing blue water navy and its long-range missile forces threaten to put Canberra within range of the People’s Liberation Army.”

Referring to territorial disputes with its neighbours, the report declares that China is “using its new military and economic weight to intimidate smaller states with competing territorial claims in the South China Sea or the Himalayan Mountains.”

In reality, the real and growing danger of war is a product of US imperialism’s determination to shore up its hegemony in Asia on every front—diplomatic, economic and military. As part of the “pivot to Asia,” the US is building up its military presence and strengthening alliances and strategic partnerships throughout the region.

The Obama administration has deliberately inflamed

territorial disputes, particularly in the South China Sea, by encouraging South East Asian countries like the Philippines and Vietnam to more aggressively assert their maritime claims against China. It has exploited the resulting tensions to justify a greater American military presence in Asia and to conclude new basing arrangements in the Philippines, Singapore and other countries.

As the report makes clear, Washington regards Canberra as a key ally, noting Obama formally announced the “pivot” in the Australian parliament in November 2011. It points out that while the US has major military bases in North East Asia it has “few reliable operating locations” in South East Asia and the South Pacific.

“Australia and New Zealand are therefore ideally placed to provide badly needed strategic operating locations,” it states. “Both countries retain close partnerships with many Pacific island states due to their long-term economic and security relationships. For these reasons, ANZUS occupies a vital role as a hub of US regional security operations and partnerships.”

The document applauds Australia’s developing military relations with Japan as “a poster child for spoke-to-spoke collaboration”—a reference to the US policy of encouraging allies to collaborate directly rather than just with Washington. It suggests that greater efforts should be made to establish closer ties with Indonesia.

The report documents the extent to which Australia has already become a major base for the US military expansion in Asia. Northern Australia is directly adjacent to key shipping routes through the Indonesian archipelago to the South China Sea that are vital for China’s supplies of energy and raw materials from Africa and the Middle East. Pentagon strategists view

the control over these sea lanes as critical to the ability of the US to mount an economic blockade of China in time of war.

The American military presence in Australia, which already included crucial spy bases such as the one at Pine Gap, has gone well beyond the 2011 agreement to base US Marines in the northern city of Darwin. The 2014 Force Posture Agreement “enabled not only the expansion of the US Marine Force, but also the rotation of a US Air Force presence in northern Australia including B-52 (and potentially B-1B) bombers, fighter jets and air-to-air refuelling aircraft.” The report also noted that studies are underway to allow “increased access for the US Navy to Australian ports for surface combatants, submarines and amphibious ships”—with a particular focus on access to the Indian Ocean from Western Australia.

The report also highlighted the “operational intimacy” between US and American forces, noting the appointment in 2013 of Australian Major-General Rick Burr as Deputy Commanding General—Operations, US Army Pacific. This was “the first time a non-American has served in such a high-ranking position.” It has been followed by leading roles being allocated to senior Australian officers during the 2014 Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) naval exercises—the world’s largest maritime war games.

The report was released in the context of the massive Talisman Sabre exercise currently underway in northern Australia involving more than 33,000 military personnel from the US and Australia, as well as contingents from New Zealand and Japan. The manoeuvres are ever more openly assuming the character of a dress rehearsal for war with China, including everything from naval encounters to long-range bombing and large-scale amphibious landings.

Asked about the report, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott played down suggestions that preparations were being made for war with China. “I’m very pleased that our friendship with China is getting stronger and stronger all the time,” he told the media. “I would rather focus on the strength of the friendship rather than on hypothetical possibilities in many, many years’ time.”

Abbott’s response is conditioned firstly by his government’s concern to avoid alienating China, Australia’s largest trading partner. The report discusses

in some detail Australia’s economic dependence on China as a possible source of friction with the US, pointing in particular to Canberra’s decision to join China’s Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank against Washington’s express wishes. It concludes, however, that the ANZUS Treaty has “a bright future” and calls for a greater focus on Asia and greater military spending by Australia to complement US war planning.

Secondly, Abbott’s comments reflect the broader media and political establishment which has remained virtually silent on the growing dangers of conflict with China for fear of provoking anti-war opposition among workers and youth. The fact that the *Australian* featured the report and the “threat” posed by China on its front page yesterday points to the fact that the media is preparing to wind up its anti-China propaganda to justify the increasingly obvious war preparations and reckless provocations by the US in flash points such as the South China Sea.

The report itself presages the further boosting of US-Australian military collaboration that will be formally laid out in a new government defence white paper which is currently in preparation.



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