Australia “central” to US plans for war with China

James Cogan
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The logic of the Australian ruling elite’s alliance with the United States and the Australian government’s unconditional support for the aggressive US “pivot to Asia” against China is spelt out in a major report published this month by the US Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

As the report makes clear, the American strategic establishment views Australia as an essential base and crucial military partner in its criminal and unhinged plans for a war to prevent China posing a challenge to US global domination.

The report, entitled “Asia-Pacific Rebalance 2025: Capabilities, Presence and Partners,” was commissioned by the US Department of Defense and the US Congress. In the section dealing with “partners,” some seven pages examine Australia’s strategic significance to the United States, as well as attitudes in political and business circles toward US-China tensions, popular opinions toward the US and China, the current state of the Australian armed forces and what Australian governments must do to meet American requirements. While Australia is discussed in the wider context of a vast expansion of US military operations in Asia, the country, along with Japan and South Korea, are specified as the linchpins of American plans.

The CSIS bluntly states: “As Australia’s own influence expands and Australia’s geopolitical position becomes more central to US strategy, Washington’s expectations of Canberra are growing.” The US, it asserts, “is particularly interested in two Australian capabilities: maritime assets and diversification of US posture.”

First of all, US imperialism wants a major build-up of the naval and air force components of the Australian Defence Force (ADF). The CSIS asserts that the Australian military is “vital to monitoring the congested and contested waters in the Indian Ocean, South East Asia and Pacific Ocean.” It suggests that as tensions grow with China, “the US will increasingly rely on Australia for some critical capabilities.” In current US strategic planning, in the event of war, Australian warships would blockade key sea lanes between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, attacking Chinese shipping in order to starve China of oil and raw materials.

To equip the Australian military for war, the Australian government will have to slash other spending—on health, education, welfare, pensions and other social needs—in order to allocate hundreds of billions of dollars for hardware, personnel and infrastructure. Just the new submarines and frigates the US expects Australia to acquire are given a minimum price tag of $89 billion. Australia’s purchase of 70 or more F-35 Joint Strike Fighters will cost well over $20 billion. The CSIS indicates that the Australian government must meet the commitment made by both the conservative and Labor parties to increase defence spending to a minimum of 2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), regardless of the political and social consequences.

Washington’s second core interest—the “diversification of US posture”—means the establishment of a range of bases across Australia for use by the American military, costing billions of dollars in infrastructure and annual maintenance. Australia already hosts some of the most critical US communications bases in the world and a six-month rotation of US Marines in the northern city of Darwin.

The CSIS makes clear Washington expects much more. The US Navy wants to be able to operate nuclear-armed submarines and warships, possibly an entire aircraft carrier battle group, from Australian ports. The naval base, HMAS Stirling in Perth Western Australia, is named as the preferred site. The report indicates that the Pentagon is dissatisfied with the fact that the US Air Force is not yet able to forward base “larger US aircraft”—such as nuclear-armed B-52 and B-2 bombers

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and B-1 “ship-killers”—at northern Australian airfields for part of the year. The CSIS complains that the additional facilities to support the basing of such aircraft have not been built, because of “discussions on cost-sharing arrangements.” It insists that “agreement on what additional infrastructure is needed” and “who will fund it.” Canberra, according to the CSIS, should just come up with the money.

In an ominous reference to the fact that it envisages a catastrophic war, the CSIS notes that “Australia’s remoteness, while sometimes a complication, also makes it a potential sanctuary in a crisis or conflict—a role it played in World War II after the fall of the Philippines.”

The report bluntly asserts: “To help the United States operate effectively in a crisis, [read war] Canberra will have to work with Washington to expand the capacity of northern Australian bases, including its network of bare bases. Ensuring that logistical needs can be met for critical supplies, such as petroleum, oils, and lubricants, will be vital to expanding not only the US military’s operational effectiveness, but the ADF’s as well.”

Australia, in other words, is to be a platform from which the US would continue a war with China if, in the initial stages of such a conflict, its military lost access to bases in Japan, South Korea, Guam and other sites closer to the Chinese mainland.

The CSIS warns the American establishment that it cannot take Australia’s collaboration for granted. “While the alliance is strong and growing increasingly central to US regional policy,” it states, “Washington and Canberra will have to *manage occasional pressures* in the relationship, particularly over how best to work together to shape China’s rise.” [emphasis added]

The CSIS stresses that “many current Australian policymakers” and “many in government” can be relied upon to maintain Australia’s alignment with Washington. Among this pro-US constituency is the Labor Party and the trade unions. In June 2010, Labor and the union powerbrokers, described by the US embassy as “assets” and “sources,” ousted Kevin Rudd as prime minister over his suggestions that Washington should moderate its policies against China. Following the backroom political coup against Rudd, his replacement as prime minister, Julia Gillard, fully committed Australia to the US confrontation with China. Underlining the centrality of Australia to US war plans, Barack Obama formally announced the “pivot” on the floor of the Australian parliament in November 2011.

The CSIS pointedly notes current Liberal Party Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull’s past expressions of concern about the economic impact on Australia of the “pivot.” But it says his comments since he ousted pro-US leader Tony Abbott “suggest a continuing commitment,” including with regard to the US provocations of China over its territorial claims in the South China Sea. Over recent days, the *Australian* newspaper has prominently reported on speculation that Turnbull will sign off on Australian warships joining the Pentagon’s “freedom of navigation” violations of Chinese claims.

The CSIS identifies two sources of opposition to US interests within Australia. Firstly, it points to the “Australian business community” for which China is the largest trading partner and main market for commodity exports. Problems could potentially emerge from that quarter.

Secondly, and most significantly, the CSIS obliquely points to the anti-war sentiments of the broader population as the greatest danger. The report cites opinion polls in which only 30 percent of Australians see China as a military threat, while 77 percent name it as an “economic partner.”

Large numbers of Australian workers and youth already correctly view the US government as a criminal regime, and oppose Australia’s complicity in its never-ending atrocities. The majority of working class people opposed the Australian deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq, with the 2003 Iraq invasion provoking the largest anti-war mobilisations in Australian history.

The consequences of Australia’s ever-expanding role in US-led militarism against China, including the imposition of austerity measures to pay for military expenditure and rising awareness of the dangers of war, will see opposition grow and erupt to the surface. The only means that Washington and its Australian allies have to “manage” such resistance is pro-war propaganda and nationalism, the stirring up of anti-Chinese chauvinism and police-state repression.

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