ASPI think tank warns of war with China and attacks on Australia

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Three weeks out from the July 2 election, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) has published a research paper titled *Agenda for Change 2016: Strategic choices for the next government*. ASPI strategists openly advise that the Australian government, during the next three-year term of parliament, will face the possibility that the tensions in the South and East China Seas could draw Australia into a full-scale war with China and result in attacks on the Australian mainland.

The document states: "There's potential that these disputes [in the South and China Seas], especially between the US and China, could spiral into conflict and involve Australia. Australian vessels operating with US forces in the region, as well as US forces stationed in Australia, would be at considerable risk of being attacked."

ASPI does not spell out how US forces in Australia could come under attack. There is, however, virtually only one conceivable way that the Chinese military could launch attacks on mainland Australia—with intercontinental ballistic missiles or nuclear weapons launched from submarines.

While the most significant US base in Australia, the satellite spying and communications facility at Pine Gap, is located in a remote and thinly-populated part of the country, US naval, Marine and air forces operate from major Australian cities such as Perth, Darwin, Townsville and Brisbane. ASPI has effectively revealed that the US-Australia military alliance and the presence of the US military in those cities have transformed them into targets in a nuclear war.

The strategists and analysts who prepare ASPI reports are fervent defenders of the US-Australia alliance and supporters of American and Australian imperialist operations on a world scale. They are not warning of the prospect of war from the standpoint of opposition, but to insist that the Australian government commit ever greater resources to the armed forces. Even if the provocative US challenges to Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea do not result in war in the next three years, the ASPI strategists advise the next Australian government that it has to be prepared to join Washington in a range of other military conflicts.

The foreword is authored by Kim "Bomber" Beazley, who was the defence minister in the Hawke Labor government from 1984 to 1990, deputy prime minister during the Keating Labor government from 1992 to 1996 and Labor Party opposition leader from 1996 to 2003 and again in 2005–2006. After leaving parliament, Beazley was appointed as Australian ambassador to the United States, a position from which he only retired last year. Beazley names the Middle East and growing tensions with Russia, as well the US-China tensions in Asia, as potential triggers for Australian military operations.

Leading ASPI analyst Peter Jennings calls for the deployment of more Australian troops to Iraq, even closer integration with the US military and the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines.

In the key chapter headlined "Defence Policy," where the warning of attacks on the Australian mainland appears, ASPI analysts advocate providing the US military with even more bases in Australia and insist that Canberra "stump up the cash" to pay for them.

Summing up its forecasts for the next three years, ASPI writes: "The government should prepare for new Australian Defence Force (ADF) operations, ranging from low-intensity but still challenging humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) tasks in the South Pacific, through significant operational tasks in the Middle East Area of Operations and potential ADF

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deployments in maritime Southeast Asia— particularly in the South China Sea—that could see them involved in high-intensity military operations alongside coalition partners, to the prospect of a major operation on the Korean Peninsula."

ASPI places the prospect of conflict and war within the context of the failure of the world economy to recover from the 2008 financial crisis. It notes the ongoing slump in the United States, Europe and Japan and highlights some of the political consequences.

In Europe, the report states, "reactionary politics is making something of a comeback in a haunting echo of what happened in the economic turmoil of the 1920s and 1930s." In the US, it asserts that "Trump is peddling a truly bizarre brand of belligerent isolationism" in the presidential election and declares there is an "emerging question about the US's willingness to play the role it has since the 1940s."

Warning of even greater economic upheaval, which will impact severely on the commodity-export dependent Australian economy, ASPI writes that China is "awash with manufacturing overcapacity, vacant real estate and public works projects for which the costs outweigh the benefits. The risk is that the banking sector will eventually fall into crisis…"

The Australian population has been kept in the dark about the content of the document. Since ASPI published it on June 7, it has not been reported in any of the major newspapers, the commercial television stations or the state-owned Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and Special Broadcasting Service (SBS). No candidates in the election, except for the candidates of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), have referred to it.

There is no innocent explanation for the silence in the Australian political and media establishment. By now, it will have been read by senior figures in all the capitalist parties and by leading journalists. They all know that ASPI analysts have warned that there is a "considerable risk" that Australia could be drawn into a catastrophic war, and face attack, most likely with nuclear weapons, because of its alliance with the United States.

The ASPI document is not being mentioned in either the media or the Australian election campaign because the establishment is acutely conscious that mass opposition will emerge once millions of workers and young people begin to recognise the danger of war. It falls to those who are becoming aware to support the SEP's campaign to break the conspiracy of silence and bring the truth into the light of day.

To contact the SEP and get involved, visit our website *or Facebook* page.

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