

Australia's role in US plans for war on North Korea

James Cogan
12 April 2017

Last Friday Australian time, within hours of the Trump administration's attack on Syria, the Liberal-National government and the Labor Party opposition both declared full support for the unilateral and illegal US actions. In doing so, they simply underscored a basic reality of world politics. The Australian ruling class, through its strategic alliance with the US, its hosting of the critical satellite communications base at Pine Gap and its provision of other military basing arrangements, serves as a direct facilitator of American imperialist aggression around the world.

US warships pounded the Syrian government airfield at Shayrat, near the city of Homs, with 59 cruise missiles. There is little doubt that Pine Gap played a key role in targeting the strikes.

Pine Gap, a complex of facilities located near Alice Springs in the centre of the Australian continent, is used to spy on a vast swathe of the world's surface, from the Middle East, across Eurasia, to the Western Pacific. The base is widely acknowledged to have been crucial for the US during the 1991 Gulf War on Iraq; throughout the now 15-year war in Afghanistan; and during the 2003 invasion of Iraq and subsequent repression of resistance across the country. Pine Gap, through intercepts of Saddam Hussein's satellite telephone, reportedly provided the coordinates for the US air strike that attempted to assassinate him in the first hours of the war.

Since 2001, the base has provided the targeting information for Predator drone-launched missile strikes in North West Pakistan, Sudan, Somalia and Yemen, which have killed thousands of civilians. Over recent years, it will have facilitated US-led air strikes in Iraq and Syria since 2014, which, while ostensibly aimed against Islamic State (ISIS), have resulted in uncounted civilian deaths and injuries, especially in Iraqi cities

such as Fallujah, Ramadi and Mosul, and the ISIS "capital" in Raqqa, Syria.

According to sources cited in yesterday's and today's Murdoch media in Australia, the 1,000 or so American and Australian intelligence personnel working at Pine Gap have now been directed to prioritise their attention on a new target: North Korea.

The Sydney *Daily Telegraph* on Tuesday reported that the US military is preparing to shoot down any long-range missile fired by North Korea this coming Saturday as part of the "celebrations" of the birthday of Kim Il-sung, the first dictator of the Stalinist regime and grandfather of current regime head Kim Jong-un. "The Australian-United States joint facility at Pine Gap monitors North Korean missile launches," the *Telegraph* noted, "and is on standby."

If Pine Gap is on "standby," it is to do far more than monitor missile launches. As in Iraq and Afghanistan, its role is to provide the coordinates for US military strikes, whether by aircraft, cruise missiles, or, potentially, by nuclear weapons. A range of reports indicate that the Pentagon has drawn up plans for a massive assault on North Korea, including "decapitation" attacks to assassinate Kim Jong-un and other "leadership" targets.

In statements yesterday, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull endorsed Washington's bellicose rhetoric against Pyongyang, declaring that "the reckless and dangerous conduct of the North Korean regime is threatening peace and stability, not just of the region, but of the whole world."

Time and again, Australia has functioned as an unalloyed US ally in its murderous use of military force to retain global military and economic hegemony. The real aim of the continuous build-up toward a confrontation on North Korea has been to threaten,

destabilise and extract massive concessions from China, which Washington considers its major rival for strategic dominance.

Decades of US provocations, and the North Korean regime's reckless and fatuous bluster that it can resist imperialism with a handful of primitive nuclear weapons, now appear to be approaching a point of no return from war.

Pine Gap is only one of the ways in which Australian imperialism is enabling the Trump administration to contemplate actions that could trigger a catastrophic war on the Korean Peninsula, potentially resulting in the use of nuclear weapons and direct military confrontation with China.

The Australian military and intelligence agencies are essentially integrated with their American counterparts and would be immediately involved in any Korean war. Dozens of Australian personnel are "embedded" into US Pacific Command (PACOM) headquarters in Hawaii, including in senior positions, or are on exchange with US units across the region.

Under agreements signed by the Gillard Labor government in 2011, and expanded under the current Turnbull conservative government, northern Australian airbases such as Tindal and Darwin—well out of range of existing North Korean and most Chinese weaponry—can be used by the US air force as required. Australian air force (RAAF) mid-flight refuelling aircraft have undergone extensive training in refuelling long-range American bombers that periodically land in Australia's north. A squadron of 12 US F-22 "Stealth" fighters has been operating from Tindal since February.

The Australian guided missile frigate HMAS Ballarat left Perth for Singapore nine days ago, while at least one of the country's Collins-class conventional attack submarines is generally on deployment in the Indo-Pacific on any given date. These warships, and possibly others, could be assigned to join US operations.

The brunt of a war on the Korean Peninsula would be borne by tens of thousands of young South Korean and North Korean military conscripts, as well as the 28,500 or so American troops in the South, and potentially millions of civilians on both sides of the border. If nuclear weapons were used, millions more people in Japan and northern China would be at risk from radiation fall-out.

If tensions escalate with China due to an attack on

North Korea, the specific role allocated to the Australian military in US war planning is to assist a blockade of the key sea lanes between the Indian and Pacific Oceans—the Malacca Straits and the Lombok and Sunda Straits through the Indonesian archipelago. In the event of open hostilities, US and Australian naval, air and marine forces operating from Australia would seek to economically starve China into submission by blocking Chinese shipping from transporting sea-borne oil, gas and other essential imports. US strategy is predicated on the staggering assumption that a war with China would not escalate into a nuclear conflict. The global consequences of a large-scale nuclear war between the US and China would be catastrophic.

The working class in Australia must join with the workers and students in South Korea, North Korea, the United States, China and Japan, and around the world, who are deeply opposed to the prospect of war. A unified international anti-war movement must be built. Such a movement must be based, not on futile protest appeals to the very governments which are plunging the world towards a disaster, but on the socialist perspective of ending capitalism itself—the source of national antagonisms and conflicts.



To contact the WSWP and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)