

Australian government commits to a US-led war on North Korea

Mike Head

12 August 2017

Defying widespread anti-war sentiment, Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull yesterday gave an unprecedented pledge to join what would be a catastrophic war by the United States against North Korea.

Without any public consultation, Turnbull vowed that his government would “come to the aid of the United States” if it were attacked by North Korea. In a radio interview, he said this pledge extended to a so-called North Korean attack on Guam, a heavily-militarised US Pacific island territory.

These comments followed Trump’s warnings that the US would unleash “fire and fury like the world has never seen” in response to further “threats” by North Korea. Trump refused to rule out a “pre-emptive strike” on North Korea in supposed “self-defence”—the doctrine first enunciated by George W. Bush to illegally invade and occupy Iraq.

Like Trump, the Liberal-National Coalition prime minister turned reality on its head. He branded North Korea “a reckless, provocative regime that seems determined to continue destabilising the region.” On the contrary, Trump’s inflammatory threats are seemingly calculated to goad the North Korean regime into a conflict.

Turnbull’s remarks gave credence to Trump’s insistence that the small, impoverished country with a relatively primitive weapons capacity, is a dire threat to the US, the world’s largest nuclear power by far. For decades, successive US administrations have sought to cripple North Korea economically and overturn its government.

Turnbull’s declarations followed a reportedly lengthy conversation on Thursday night with US Vice President Mike Pence, an indication of Washington’s insistence on Australia’s unwavering alignment.

Earlier in the week, Turnbull had declined to explicitly endorse Trump’s threats. On Wednesday, Turnbull warned of “catastrophic consequences” of a Korean war and said the only way to deal with North Korea was with “maximum economic pressure” and UN sanctions. That line was overturned following Pence’s phone call.

Turnbull’s commitment has enormous implications. If the US triggers a war against North Korea, Australia will be involved immediately in a conflagration that could rapidly draw in China, a major nuclear power.

Not only will the US-Australia Pine Gap satellite communications facility in central Australia be automatically engaged in coordinating the assault and targeting bombing sites, bases across northern Australia, from where US warplanes and Marines operate, will become war staging posts.

Beyond that, the US is likely to request the deployment of Australian Special Forces troops, warships and planes—all of which are already closely integrated into the US military.

Turnbull doubled down on his remarks yesterday afternoon before ostentatiously spending 90 minutes at Defence headquarters in Canberra with Defence Minister Marise Payne, getting briefed on North Korea by military chiefs, nuclear experts and the heads of the intelligence agencies, including the Defence Intelligence Organisation.

“We stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the United States,” Turnbull reiterated outside the Defence complex. “The ANZUS Treaty means that if America is attacked we will come to their aid. If Australia is attacked, the Americans will come to our aid. We are joined at the hip. The American Alliance is the bedrock of our national security.”

This is only the second time an Australian

government has cited the 1951 ANZUS “collective security” treaty as requiring a military mobilisation behind a US-instigated war. Prime Minister John Howard invoked the treaty to join the devastating US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003, purportedly to “defend” America from Islamic terrorists and non-existent “weapons of mass destruction.”

Turnbull’s remarks flatly contradicted Foreign Minister Julie Bishop. She had told the media on Thursday that the ANZUS agreement only required Australia, New Zealand and the US to “consult together” in the event of an attack.

Bishop also had insisted that Australia was not a party to the ceasefire that ended the Korean War in 1953 and not legally obliged to automatically join a conflict on the peninsula. Australian military forces were on the frontlines of that war that killed at least three million people.

Labor Party opposition leader Bill Shorten yesterday swiftly backed Turnbull’s total commitment to Washington. “I and the government share the same concerns and the same views, and Australians should be reassured that on this matter of North Korea and our national security, the politics of Labor and Liberal are working absolutely together,” he said.

The *Australian* today hailed Turnbull and Shorten. “Australians can be proud of Malcolm Turnbull’s pledge to stand alongside the US if North Korea attacks the superpower,” the editorial proclaimed. “At a historic juncture, he rose to the challenge.” Shorten’s response was “good.”

Nevertheless, there is unmistakable nervousness in Australia’s ruling class about the prospect of a nuclear war in Asia. Such a war, particularly if it dragged in China, could have a calamitous fallout for Australian capitalism, which depends heavily both on exports to China and investment from the US. It would also ignite opposition among young people and the working class to a conflict that could endanger life on the planet.

On Thursday, an *Australian Financial Review* editorial supported Turnbull’s initial warning of “catastrophic consequences,” declaring that Trump’s “daring rhetoric is extremely high risk.” Similar anxieties are surfacing in military and strategic circles. Former Australian Army chief Peter Leahy today urged Turnbull to consult parliament before joining the US in

a “bloody ugly” war against North Korea.

The Australian Greens have also voiced reservations. Greens leader Senator Richard Di Natale yesterday accused Turnbull of “putting a target on Australia’s back.” Di Natale contended: “If there was ever a clearer example of why Australia needs to ditch the US alliance and forge an independent, non-aligned foreign policy, this is it.”

The Greens, resting on an upper middle-class constituency, reflect the twin concern of sections of the capitalist elite about the potential economic disaster and the danger of triggering popular anti-war opposition. Their calls for an “independent” foreign policy are also oriented to the pursuit of the profit interests of Australian big business.

Despite the Greens’ posturing, they bear direct responsibility for the war danger. They welcomed President Barack Obama’s aggressive military and strategic “pivot” to Asia, aimed against China, which Trump has expanded and made more bellicose. When Obama announced the “pivot” on the floor of the Australian parliament in 2011, Greens MPs applauded and maintained their backing for the minority Labor government of Julia Gillard.

Like the Greens, the pseudo-left groups are complicit in the eruption of US militarism, having endorsed Washington’s brutal intervention in Syria. Noticeably, all these groups—such as Socialist Alternative and the Socialist Alliance—have remained silent this week on the mounting war drive. They are doing everything they can to play down the danger and prevent the development of a politically conscious anti-war movement.



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