

Australia deploys for war with North Korea and confrontation with China

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One gauge of the advanced preparations for a US-led war on the Korean peninsula is the military and diplomatic activity of key American allies. For its part, the Australian government is mobilising its armed forces to support the Trump administration's threat to "totally destroy" North Korea and the broader US aim of shattering China's geo-strategic influence in Asia and internationally.

An attack submarine, HMAS Dechaineux, is already in the potential war zone, taking part in joint exercises with Japanese submarines and the cruise missile-armed American submarine USS Key West.

A flotilla of six Australian warships is making its way through the South Pacific, South East Asia and the South China Sea, and is scheduled to arrive in the next few weeks in the waters off South Korea and Japan.

The fleet is led by HMAS Adelaide, one of Australia's 27,500-tonne mini-aircraft carriers or Landing Helicopter Dock (LHD) warships. The main component, however, is four of the Navy's most sophisticated guided-missile frigates, which have been particularly equipped for anti-submarine warfare and trained to operate in support of American aircraft carriers.

The frigates would be available to join any US-imposed naval blockade of North Korea, which would potentially involve attempting to interdict Chinese-flagged vessels.

Since leaving Sydney Harbour on September 4, Australian warships have made high profile port calls in East Timor, the Micronesian island of Yap, Indonesia and Malaysia. The HMAS Adelaide and a frigate arrived yesterday in the Philippines, and hosted a tour by the country's fascist president, Rodrigo Duterte.

Speaking to the purpose of the naval deployment,

Duterte declared: "You have to keep watch over him [North Korean leader Kim Jong-un]. It is good to be prepared [for war]."

The warship visits complement diplomatic initiatives by the Australian government of Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull. On behalf of its US ally, Australian imperialism has sought to use its regional influence to stifle any expression of opposition, particularly by South East Asian countries, to a disastrous war with North Korea.

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop and Defence Minister Marise Payne left Australia today for another round of two-day, top-level talks with the South Korean government, following earlier discussions in September. North Korea is the main item on the agenda.

Underscoring Australia's willingness to join a US-led war, Bishop wrote in today's *Australian*: "We are vocal in our support of the United States, reaffirming its longstanding policy that 'all options are on the table'. These options include the use of military force to deter North Korea from continually threatening other countries with illegal weapons."

On October 6, retired Australian rear admiral James Goldrick and US-based strategic analyst Andrew Shearer wrote in the *Australian* that "challenges" from China and North Korea meant the country's navy should be concentrated on operations in the Western Pacific, far from Australian shores. The current flotilla, they declared, could "mark the start of this new focus."

Goldrick and Shearer opined that "one option" would be the "integration of individual Australian combat units into American formations." Ships such as the Australian frigates, they asserted, "may be particularly welcome [by the US] to supplement the carrier battle groups of the Seventh Fleet, whose escort forces have

been depleted by accidents.”

Australian ground forces have also been trained to be “interoperable” with American troops, particularly since the Labor government of Prime Minister Julia Gillard gave full support to the US “pivot to Asia” in November 2011.

At the beginning of October, the commander of the military’s “Deployable Joint Force Headquarters” based in the northern city of Darwin told the US Naval Institute that it was now “ready for operations.” The force consists of battalions of the Australian Army that have trained with the US Marines who have been based in the city for six months each year since 2011.

The current US Marine deployment of 1,250 troops in Darwin is just completing its rotation. Along with a similar number of Australian troops, they have been undergoing intensive training since April for amphibious landings from both ships and aircraft. They would be among the first forces available for deployment in the event of war on the Korean peninsula.

While it is never publicly stated, a potential role for a joint US-Australian force would be to seize Chinese-occupied islets in the South China Sea if tensions with Beijing escalated to the point of open conflict.

A raft of strategic speeches and policy papers since 2011 have made no secret that China is the target of the US “pivot.” The American ruling class is prepared to wage a catastrophic war to prevent China from ever being able to challenge American global dominance.

The Obama administration exploited territorial disputes in the South China Sea to launch open provocations against Beijing, such as “freedom of navigation” intrusions by US warships into Chinese-claimed territory. Since Trump took office, North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs has been seized upon as the pretext to massively intensify military tensions in the region.

The destruction of the North Korean regime—the stated aim of the Trump administration—threatens Beijing with the prospect of a US-led military force on its borders. In 1950, China sent hundreds of thousands of troops into North Korea to prevent such an outcome. As they drove American forces back from the 38th parallel, the US military called for the use of the atom bomb. In 2017, the undeniable danger that faces the international working class is that US imperialism will

use nuclear weapons and trigger a full-scale nuclear exchange.

US bases in Australia directly enable American imperialism to threaten the planet with catastrophe.

The satellite and communication base at Pine Gap in central Australia provides the American military with continuous real-time targeting of coordinates for airstrikes and missiles—including for nuclear missile attacks.

Airfields in the far north of Australia have been characterised in US strategic documents as “safe havens” for American aircraft, as they are beyond the range of most Chinese and North Korean missiles. F-22 stealth fighters, B2 stealth bombers, and B1 and B52 long-range strategic bombers are among the American assets that have practised operating from northern Australia.

The political establishment in Australia is doing everything possible to prevent any public debate on the role of Australian imperialism in the US preparations for war with North Korea.

The media provides only the most cursory and uncritical coverage of the Turnbull government’s backing for a “military option” in North Korea. The Labor Party opposition has declared that it stands with the government in full support for the Trump administration. The Greens, who occasionally posture as critics of Australia’s alliance with the US, have remained silent in the face of the evermore reckless and provocative statements issued by Trump.

The response of every concerned worker and young person must be to join the fight to build an anti-war movement in the international working class, based on a socialist perspective and politically independent from every wing of the capitalist establishment.



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