

Australian government upgrades northern military bases following “drums of war” call

Mike Head
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Prime Minister Scott Morrison yesterday announced a revamped \$747 million package to overhaul four strategic military facilities in the Northern Territory, clearly in preparation for a US-instigated war against China.

The announcement came just two days after Home Affairs Department secretary Michael Pezzullo issued an extraordinary public warning that the “drums of war are beating” and the country must be prepared “to send off, yet again, our warriors to fight,” as in World Wars I and II.

The bases named by Morrison are all in areas around the vital northern port of Darwin. Their upgrades feature weapons-firing ranges, the lengthening of an airstrip to support heavier US aircraft and new training facilities for Australian troops and US marines, thousands of whom have been rotated through Darwin since 2012.

Morrison said the “investment” was part of an \$8 billion fund dedicated to “defence infrastructure” in the Northern Territory over the next decade. That underscores the importance of Australian bases for US war plans.

The bases slated for upgrades are the Robertson Barracks Close Training Area, Kangaroo Flats Training Area, Mount Bunney Training Area and Bradshaw Field Training Area. The upgrades were said to support “greater engagement and combined training with the US under the Force Posture Agreement,” which provides for the Marine rotations and extensive US access to Australian military bases.

The upgrades include “urban assault” and “urban operations” facilities, indicating the training of troops for urban warfare, and for use domestically to suppress unrest, including anti-war resistance and protests.

Greg Sheridan, the *Australian*’s foreign editor, who has sources inside Washington’s intelligence and military apparatus, spelled out the agenda in chilling terms, invoking a scenario of a Pacific-wide war.

“[T]he primary strategic purpose of the defence

upgrades is to help the US disperse and decentralise its military forces in the Indo-Pacific,” he wrote in a front-page column. “This means that they are harder to hit and more survivable in the event of any massive, pre-emptive strike by Beijing.”

Such language points to detailed planning for war. Sheridan linked Morrison’s announcement to a Pentagon effort to move away from “an over-dependence on forces concentrated in Okinawa and Guam,” where the US has major military bases within striking distance of China.

Sheridan couched this message in terms of alleged Chinese aggression. But the reality is that the US and its allies, with Australia taking a vanguard role, are militarily encircling China and imposing sanctions and other punitive economic measures. The aim, outlined in US strategic documents, is to prevent any challenge to the regional and global hegemony obtained by US imperialism in World War II.

The government timed Pezzullo’s declaration to be delivered on Anzac Day, a nationalist holiday that promotes militarism by glorifying the disastrous and failed invasion of Turkey by Britain, Australia and New Zealand in 1915 during World War I.

“The least we can do for the host of the dead whom we remember this Anzac week is to be prepared to face equivalent challenges with the same resolve and sense of duty that they displayed in years past,” Pezzullo insisted.

Pezzullo’s message was initially sent as a mass email to Home Affairs Department staff and then published as op-ed in the *Australian*, a Murdoch media flagship. Home Affairs Minister Karen Andrews said she had approved Pezzullo’s email, confirming that it is part of a synchronised political campaign.

The aim is to condition public opinion for a potentially catastrophic war fought with nuclear weapons. Australia would be on the frontline because of its geographic location and hosting of key US bases, such as the Pine

Gap satellite communications facility in central Australia.

The Australian government, backed by the corporate media, has significantly sped up the pace of these war preparations, and the fomenting of anti-China sentiment, since the inauguration of the Biden administration, which has accelerated Washington's confrontation with Beijing.

Last weekend, Peter Dutton, recently elevated to defence minister, declared that the prospect of a war with China over Taiwan should not be "discounted." He accused China of "militarisation of bases across the region."

Days earlier, the Liberal-National government cancelled two vague Victorian state government infrastructure agreements with China, citing security concerns, setting a global precedent for tearing up economic relations with Beijing.

Of immense concern in ruling circles is the widespread popular anti-war sentiment and antagonism to US militarism. That was shown first in the movement against the murderous neo-colonial Vietnam War, and deepened in the huge protests around Australia—some of the largest per capita in the world—against the predatory US invasion of Iraq in 2003 based on the lies of "weapons of mass destruction."

So great was the discrediting of Washington by the mass killings, abuses and devastation of Iraq that the previous Howard Liberal-National government and the American Australian Association founded a US Studies Centre at the University of Sydney in 2006 to attempt to counter the hostility.

Pezzullo sought to directly combat the public opposition to war. "Let there not be doubt—war shakes confidence in a civilisation's soul," he said. "Who could begrudge the sorrow of Europeans after the horror of World War I?

"Yet, in their sorrow and their revulsion at the thought of another terrible bloodbath, they did not heed the drums of war that beat through the 1930s—until too late they once again took up arms against Nazism and Fascism."

Pezzullo did not name China, but his target was obvious. In effect, he declared China to be as great a threat to the world as Nazi Germany, and urged faster preparations for war.

Sheridan's column set out to reinforce these "co-ordinated, grave messages." He stated: "Australians would be foolish to think this is just politics. The Australian government's dialogue with its own people reflects parallel dialogues in comparable nations."

At the same time, Sheridan criticised the government for "still moving far too slowly." This reflects the Biden

administration's ratcheting up of the US conflict with China. During the past month, both the outgoing and incoming heads of the US Indo-Pacific Command have said a war with China over Taiwan is likely within five years.

How far and fast this war agitation is mounting can be seen from yesterday's *Australian* editorial. Backing Pezzullo and Dutton, it urged the development of the country's own nuclear weapons, under conditions in which "the pandemic has left deep and debilitating scars across the world, including the US, Europe and India."

Some Labor Party figures voiced nervousness about Pezzullo's reference to the "drums of war." Western Australian (WA) Premier Mark McGowan urged the Morrison government to "tone it down." He asked: "What good does that do, saying things like that?"

Apart from the heavy dependence of the WA economy on exports to China, mainly iron ore and gas, these remarks reflect worry that such comments will backfire, alerting the population to the war dangers and fuelling opposition, rather than overcoming it.

Labor is totally committed to the US military alliance. The most notable feature of its recent national conference was the frequency of the references to Labor governments being best able to impose the sacrifices required in periods of crisis and war.

Party leader Anthony Albanese and other shadow ministers, echoed by trade union bureaucrats, boasted that the Curtin Labor government initiated the US alliance in 1941 during World War II, and the delegates unanimously passed six resolutions denouncing China.



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